

# ***synergy***

Issue 23 August 2006

Institute for Teaching and Learning  
*supporting the scholarship of teaching &  
learning at the University of Sydney*

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OVERSEAS PLACEMENTS

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FEEDBACK FOR TEACHERS

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GIVING STUDENTS VOICE

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USING SCEQ & SREQ DATA

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REWARDING TEACHING

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INTERPROFESSIONAL LEARNING

# ***about synergy***

*Synergy* is a scholarly forum for the discussion and debate of higher education teaching and learning at The University of Sydney. Produced by the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL), *Synergy* is published twice per year, usually May and October and is circulated to staff through academic and research departments. *Synergy* is edited by Tai Peseta in consultation with the Director and staff of the ITL.

## **Contributions to *Synergy***

The Editor welcomes contributions from the university community all year round. *Synergy* particularly welcomes contributions written collaboratively by staff and students that:

- report on, or are critical reflections of an aspect of teaching or students' learning
- report on a teaching, learning or curriculum initiative designed to engage students in active learning or inquiry
- use disciplinary research/concepts to develop ideas about teaching and student learning
- report on curriculum initiatives designed to bring teaching and research together to improve student learning

From 2004, scholarly and research-based contributions to *Synergy* attract points on the University's Scholarship Index. Unless negotiated with the Editor, contributions must be limited to 2000 words, adhere to the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for referencing, and be accompanied by a 300 word biography outlining significant teaching and learning research interests, publications and projects, and positions of leadership.

## **Publicising your event in *Synergy***

Staff and students of the University are welcome to publicise forthcoming higher education teaching and learning events in *Synergy*. These might be conferences, public lectures or seminars by visiting scholars relevant to higher education teaching and learning. However, the Editor reserves the right to negotiate such publicity.

## **Contact the Editor**

For further information about *Synergy*, visit the website – <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy>, or contact the Editor, Tai Peseta on (+61 2) 9351 4657 or email [synergy@itl.usyd.edu.au](mailto:synergy@itl.usyd.edu.au).

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# editorial



This issue of *Synergy* brings together yet another discrete set of voices to the work of developing university teaching and learning. And even though these voices focus on different aspects and contexts of the pedagogical encounter, they have in common a genuine concern for student learning—in all its complexity and difficulty. Certainly, in my conversations with colleagues, there is a worry sometimes that discourses of student-centred learning can roll too easily and effortlessly off the tongue in the performative university. In a university that has set its sights on 1:5:40 (ranked 1st in Australia, 5th in Asia and 40th in the world), in the University of Excellence (to use Bill Readings' term), the struggle to define precisely how we are to hold on to a moral, ethical and authentic vision of student learning is becoming increasingly under strain. I would want to argue that this is the very work we must not lose sight of. It is the work that demands us to be critically engaged as academics and to help our students see that necessity. It is the work of shaping and staging an appropriate pedagogical terrain so that students can be fully present in their learning. It is the work of active participation, and as Jon Nixon (2001) writes, it is work that must be both oppositional *and* self-critical.

Each of the scholarly papers in this issue, go some way to this end. In many cases, they are instances of local practices intended to engage with student learning at different levels and for different purposes.

*Dee Carter* from the School of Molecular and Microbial Sciences writes of her efforts in developing an international context for her research students' learning. She is joined by her students (both past and present) *Michael Stat*, *Leona Campbell* and *Shona Blair* in a conversation about their experiences of inhabiting new cultural spaces; learning in different research laboratories, and seeing how science works elsewhere. This is one kind of response to institutional surveys such as the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) which suggest that our research students across the board struggle to feel part of a research climate. Dee's

paper points us to asking how this can be an experience for every research student, no matter the discipline.



We then turn to some new work taking place in the ITL. *Paul Ginns* and *Simon Barrie*, report on the expanded suite of surveys for the evaluation of teaching. These new surveys are intended to account for the variety of modes, contexts and spaces which characterize teaching and learning at USydney at the level of the individual teacher. They describe the process of the surveys' development, their basis in student learning scholarship and the extensive consultation with the university community.

It is a report which might be seen as a companion piece to the work *Rachel Symons* has been undertaking in the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). Institutional surveys yield both quantitative and qualitative data about the student experience, and our focus on the statistical outputs is sometimes to the detriment of students' written comments. For some years, Rachel has been responsible for developing a collection of reports about the qualitative data derived the Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ). Her article is both a detailed account of that process and an invitation to make more meaningful use of this data.

A description of an eLearning Resource Centre forms the basis of a paper from *Mary Jane Mahony* and *Helen Wozniak*. As the university comes to grips with the outcomes of its recent restructure, important work continues on around eLearning for student learning. Their paper describes a common set of exemplar materials which showcase the potential of WebCT, from the teacher's (or designer's) perspective but with student learning in the Health Sciences at the foreground.

An example of one such resource is provided in *Liz Devonshire* and *Helen Wozniak's* article—a

resource devoted to the development of inter-professional learning. The rationale for inter-professional learning in the Health Sciences has the end result of improving the quality of patient care. Preparing students who have the skills, attributes and knowledges to act in work-based settings, collaboratively with other professionals, then becomes crucial.

Taking a slightly different turn, *Jennifer O'Dea's* paper is an attempt to lend credence to the 'student voice'. From the Faculty of Education and Social Work, Jenny draws on traditions and scholars of critical pedagogy—particularly Stephen Brookfield, Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux— to offer a set of strategies which give us the courage to do so. It's not a naïve rendering, and Jenny points to the ongoing nature and negotiation inherent in this sort of engagement.

And finally, in a paper on curriculum evaluation and review of the Bachelor of Land & Water Science, *Dhia Al Bakri* argues for a Learning Outcomes Model approach. In this context, a curriculum that focuses on student learning means beginning with what we want students to learn and experience not only the content we want to teach them. The shift is a subtle but important one - it is an expanded idea of student learning.

Elsewhere in this issue, we remain faithful to providing a sense of the teaching and learning conversations taking place throughout the institution. We profile the work of Jennifer Hodgson, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) in the Faculty of Veterinary Science. Jennie reflects on the ongoing challenges of working collegially to affect pedagogical change. The reward and recognition of teaching through the national Carrick Awards; Vice-Chancellor's Awards and the NSW Minister for Education and Training & the Australian College of Educators Quality Teaching Awards, demonstrates that the university is a leader in pedagogical innovation and scholarly inquiry in teaching and learning. We would like to congratulate all those recipients of awards, and those nominated, and we encourage

you to make contact with them. We also report on recent news in the ITL; include a listing of higher education conferences that may be of interest, and review two recent book publications – the first, Alan Skelton's *Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: towards a critical approach*; and the second, Angela Brew's *Research and Teaching: Beyond the Divide*. Each text offers a fresh vision for rethinking the nature of our work as teachers.

Please continue to offer us your feedback about *Synergy*. It is these comments which provide us with different and creative ideas about how best to represent teaching and learning. If you have an idea for a themed issue, or would like a sounding board for your ideas, please feel free to drop me a line at [synergy@itl.usyd.edu.au](mailto:synergy@itl.usyd.edu.au) or visit the website at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy>.

My thanks again to each of the contributors who in spite of their own full schedules, found the time to add their voice and scholarship to these important debates.

**Tai Peseta, Editor**  
Institute for Teaching and Learning

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Shona Blair and Dee Carter

## Enhancing the research student learning experience through overseas placements

Dee Carter, Michael Stat, Leona Campbell & Shona Blair  
School of Molecular and Microbial Biosciences

A common misconception among the general public – largely engendered by Hollywood and popular literature – is that scientific research is a lonely, independent pursuit in which the researcher fiercely guards his or her scientific findings from the scrutiny of ruthless competitors. Of course, while there are some aspects of research that encourage secrecy, the open exchange of ideas and information is key to successful research, and access to a broad academic research culture an essential part of postgraduate development (Deem, Brehony, 2000).

Within today's academic research culture, establishing networks with peers and experts in the field of study is of particular importance. As stated by Pearson and Brew (2002) in their study of research training practices, in the current climate of rapid growth of knowledge, "knowing who" is just as important as "knowing how". National and international conferences are frequently the first point at which PhD students are able to hear from international experts in their fields and where they can begin to establish their own scientific networks (Delamont et al., 1997). Most Australian postgraduate students have the opportunity to attend national and international meetings during their PhD studies, and these are well recognized as enhancing the PhD experience (Heath, 2002).

When I began my own research group, one of my highest priorities was to ensure all of my students were able to attend at least one international conference in their subject area. There was no question that

the students returned to the laboratory energized and enthusiastic, with new research ideas and new friends and colleagues in their field. But the experience could also be daunting to students setting out on their research careers—could the research that we do in Australia on our limited budgets and under-resourced facilities possibly compete with the work being done in the high-powered, no-expense-spared labs of the United States and Europe? I began to question whether the experience might be enhancing the feeling of distance and isolation from the major research centres, rather than helping integration into the international community.

The answer of course is not to compete but to collaborate. So while I still insist on overseas conferences, recently a major focus in my postgraduate supervision has become fostering placement of my students in the laboratories of overseas collaborators. In addition to significantly enhancing their PhD studies, the experience of different research laboratories and supervisors has helped them to understand the diversity of the culture of research and research supervision. This has been of value when they have been in the position of assisting overseas visitors to our own laboratory, and will become increasingly important as they move toward leading their own research groups. The collaborative projects undertaken with the overseas laboratories have led to joint research papers and enhanced job prospects for the students, and these have strengthened ties with my laboratory and raised the profile and the visibility of our research.

In this article I will share with you some of the experiences of students during their overseas placements, and how these have had led to new friendships, collaborations, cultural experiences, research papers and employment opportunities.

### Michael Stat

#### *Working with a US expert to establish a standard for the molecular typing of Symbiodinium*

In 2002 I attended a coral bleaching workshop on Heron Island in the Great Barrier Reef. The workshop brought together a suite of international scientists with expertise in different areas of coral biology. It was at this meeting that I met Dr Todd LaJeunesse, who is one of the leading scientists on the diversity and biogeographic distribution of algae that live symbiotically with corals. The work for my PhD focused on the diversity of these algae in the southern Great Barrier Reef, and meeting Dr LaJeunesse, whose name I had seen on many articles published in international science journals, was very exciting.

Two years later I found my work to be aligning with that of Dr LaJeunesse, and I asked Dee if I could spend some time working with him at the University of Georgia in Athens USA. The experience and knowledge that I acquired during this time was invaluable to my career as a scientist. The immediate benefit that I gained was that I learnt a new technique that could be applied to my research. But just as important was the experience of working under a different scientific mentor and in

a different lab. The ability to work in diverse lab environments with different people is in my opinion, a key factor to a successful career in science. Collaborations with other research groups are founded by the ability of participants to work together in a shared research space, and learning this skill early is highly advantageous. In addition, as a student it is valuable to be exposed to a diverse range of ideas and techniques to develop a personal style of thinking and undertaking science. When it came time to writing my thesis I found that the discussions I had with Dr LaJeunesse during my time in the USA significantly improved my ability to critically analyze my work and interpret the data in a larger biological and ecological perspective.

Shortly after working with Dr LaJeunesse, I presented my work at a Coral Reef Symposium in Japan. Participating in such events is critical to a science career, as these meetings provide the environment for discussion on current and future directions in science. The connections I had established with US scientists during the time spent working with Dr LaJeunesse made attending the international conference much more rewarding. Not only was I going to a formal scientific meeting, but I could meet up with friends and discuss coral biology on a social level, in this case usually at the local sushi train.

The experience and good fun that I had working in Athens helped me decide that I wanted to work in the US as a Postdoctoral Fellow. I gained the courage and determination to pursue that goal from the experience with Dr LaJeunesse and am currently working at the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology.

### **Leona Campbell**

*Learning new techniques in the Duke University Mycology Research Unit, North Carolina, USA*

I believe one of the most impor-

tant roles of a PhD mentor is to encourage their students to become involved in their respective research communities through collaborations with other researchers and through networking at meetings and conferences. Having recently started in my first post-doc position at Saint Louis University, St Louis, USA, I can say without reservation that a large part of the success of my academic career to date is due to the international collaborations and network of colleagues developed through my time spent overseas during my PhD candidature at the University of Sydney.

At the first meeting with my PhD mentor, Dee asked "do you mind spending a few months in the US?" Between 2003 and 2005, I spent almost six months working at Duke University in the laboratory of Howard Hughes Research Fellow Dr Joseph Heitman. The experience of working in the US and in such a well-funded lab was eye-opening and increased my appreciation for the calibre and dedication of

and interact, both academically and socially, with scientists from around the world. While at Woods Hole, I approached a number of the academics, including my current employer and mentor, about post-doctoral positions in their labs.

Most of my networking and introductions to peers occurred at the four international conferences I attended during my candidature. The first I was fortunate to attend at the very start of my PhD on home soil in Adelaide, South Australia. This international meeting is held every four years, is specific to the pathogenic organism that was the focus of my PhD research, and is attended by the entire research community. While watching the presentations in Adelaide in 2002, I remember commenting that at the next meeting in Boston, 2005, I would be at the end of my PhD candidature and would be up there presenting my own work. Four years later, there I was in Boston, one of the handful of students selected to present their work to the interna-

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***... the open exchange of ideas and information is key to successful research, and access to a broad academic research culture an essential part of postgraduate development.***

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scientists in Australia who work with significantly fewer resources. At Duke I had the opportunity to learn new techniques and discuss my work with scientists from around the world, many of which were leaders in my chosen field. The success of my work at Duke University resulted in the publication of my first two research papers in an international scientific journal during the third year of my candidature.

Through my connections at Duke University, I learned of a course at the prestigious Marine Biological Laboratories, Woods Hole, Massachusetts. As one of only sixteen applicants accepted into the 2004 course I was able to meet

tional community. I feel I am now firmly established as part of that scientific community.

Finally, having accepted a post-doctoral position and knowing I had a life after PhD waiting for me, was key in maintaining my focus during that most difficult of times, writing my thesis. Many of my peers, who did not have the overseas experience I had and were unsure of their choices and direction post-PhD, have commented on the difficulty maintaining focus towards the end of their studies. I know I would not be where I am today if I had not had that overseas placement experience.

## Shona Blair

### *Forging international collaboration in honey research*

I work in a very exciting, but rather small field, investigating the antimicrobial and wound healing properties of honey. My first PhD supervisor departed rather abruptly for an overseas position, leaving me “orphaned” as no-one else in the department of microbiology worked in this area. Fortunately, Dee offered

to take me into her lab, even though my project was very different from the rest of her work.

There are really only two other major groups working in my field, one in Wales and the other in New Zealand. I had been particularly keen to spend some time with the group in Wales, who were looking at cytokine expression in response to honey in order to understand how honey might promote wound healing. Dee fully supported this placement and I spent

a little over a month at the University of Wales. Not only did I have a very interesting and productive time, but I forged very strong friendships and collaborative relationships with the Welsh team that continue to this day. We produced a joint publication in an international, peer-reviewed journal, still discuss our work regularly via e-mail, and always meet up when we happen to be in the same country. A couple of years ago, when the head of the Welsh team, Dr Rose Cooper, was chairing a session at the





8th IBRA International Conference on Tropical Bees and VI Encontro sobre Abelhas in Brazil, she invited me to give a keynote presentation, even though I was still a student at the time. This was without question the highlight of my PhD. It was the first time that this conference included a session on the therapeutic use of hive products, as up until then this meeting was largely concerned with the biology and genetics of social insects. To be asked to give the opening presentation in the session was not only a great honour, it was highly motivating for me. It was wonderful to find that my research generated a great deal of interest and serious consideration amongst senior scientists from around the world. The success of our session in Brazil increased the interest in the therapeutic potential of honey and other hive products in a number of centres, as well as exposing my work to the international scientific community. For example, I was recently asked to chair a session in a similar meeting at the 8th Australian Asian Apicultural conference in Perth.

The other major player and undisputed world expert in honey research, Professor Peter Molan, is based in New Zealand. I have visited him on a number of occasions, and meet with him whenever we are attending the same conference or are in the same country. It is always extremely stimulating to spend time talking over ideas with him, and to sound out problems that arise in our work from time to time. Recently, my PhD student and I visited Peter to talk about the ongoing projects in our labs, and she spent a couple of weeks working in the New Zealand laboratory to standardize a test that we had found particularly problematic. Peter and I are currently working on initiating a large collaborative grant based on the antibacterial properties of honey.

It has become clear to me that communication and networks are of paramount importance in science. When I started my PhD I was the only person in Sydney working in

my field. Although Dee was a very supportive supervisor it would have been very easy for me to feel academically isolated. The opportunities I have been granted to work in overseas labs and attend and participate in international meetings have helped me to feel part of a larger scientific community. To be known internationally in this small field, and to be asked to chair and present at meetings is very gratifying, motivating and stimulating. These experiences have also given me great confidence in presenting my work and discussing it critically with more senior scientists. I very much doubt that this would have occurred without the overseas placements that I experienced during my candidature.

## Conclusion

These research students' experiences indicate the expanded learning opportunities offered through overseas placements and international collaboration. In a climate where there is increasing emphasis on supporting students to feel part of a community of researchers, the challenge for research higher degree programs in the future, will be to imagine how these experiences form an integral part of every candidature - that these experiences are not purely a matter of chance, but a matter of securing the quality of research student learning.

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**Dee Carter** is a senior lecturer and the head of the Discipline of Microbiology, School of Molecular and Microbial Biosciences. She joined the University of Sydney in 1995 after completing her undergraduate degree in New Zealand and her PhD in Imperial College, London, followed by postdoctoral placements in France and the United States. Her research centres on using molecular markers to investigate the natural life histories of lower eukaryotes, including pathogenic, toxigenic, allergenic and agriculturally important fungi, and algae that live symbiotically with corals. She has a particular interest in postgraduate education and has supervised eleven PhD theses to completion, with a twelfth currently under examination.

**Michael Stat** completed his PhD in early 2006, which examined the diversity and stability of the coral symbionts of Great Barrier Reef corals. He is now continuing this line of work as a postdoctoral fellow at the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, USA.

**Leona Campbell** submitted her PhD in January, 2006, and left the following day for a postdoctoral fellowship in St Louis, Missouri, USA. Her PhD research focused on the genetic diversity and population biology of *Cryptococcus gattii*, a yeast pathogen that can cause meningitis in humans and other animals. She is now working on drug resistance in the closely related *Cryptococcus neoformans*, which is a major AIDS pathogen.

**Shona Blair** completed her PhD late 2004, and has been funded since then by a Rural Industries Research and Development grant as a part-time postdoctoral fellow in Dee Carter's lab. She pioneered the study of the antibacterial and wound healing properties of Australian honeys and is currently looking at the genetic mechanisms underlying susceptibility to honey in wound pathogens.

If you would like to have further conversation about this work, contact Dee Carter at: [d.carter@mmb.usyd.edu.au](mailto:d.carter@mmb.usyd.edu.au)



Paul Ginns

## **The revised and expanded Feedback for Teaching evaluation service**

**Paul Ginns and Simon Barrie  
Institute for Teaching and Learning**

**T**he *Feedback for Teachers* (FFT) service is available to teaching staff who wish to gather feedback about the quality of their teaching (<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/>); thus, the focus is on the teacher, rather than the degree or unit of study. Traditionally, FFT surveys have been intended for formative rather than summative teaching evaluation; users of this service are generally seeking relatively informal feedback on their teaching. The idiosyncratic nature of teaching has meant that many teachers have developed their own informal teaching evaluation forms, focusing on areas of specific interest or concern. The ITL does not seek to discourage such practices – in fact, it encourages teaching staff to consider collecting their own feedback (see <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/FEEDBACK/gatherstufeed.htm>, or Gibbs, Habeshaw, & Habeshaw, 1988, for a variety of alternative methods for teaching evaluation) – but there is nonetheless a need for a suite of standardised FFT surveys which can be used in a process of critical reflection on teaching, as well as for career-related purposes such as promotions or teaching award applications. Currently, only three different FFT surveys are available: *Large Group Teaching*, *Tutorial Teaching*, and *Clinical Teaching*.

In the past few years, the ITL has received many requests for an expanded range of FFT surveys, to better take into account the diversity of teaching contexts within the University. Our overall goal has been to develop an expanded suite of FFT surveys which are (a) student-focussed; (b) aligned with institutional perspectives on qual-

ity assurance and improvement of teaching and learning; and (c) defensible in terms of their psychometric characteristics. The challenge then has been to develop surveys with the same rigour in the design process that has gone into the development of other surveys such as the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), the Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ), and the Unit of Study Evaluation (USE).

The expanded range of FFT surveys will include Teaching in Lectures; Teaching in Tutorials; Teaching in Demonstrations; Teaching in Clinic; Teaching at a Distance (for Distance Education units); and Teaching with e-Learning. For each survey, the development process has not taken place in isolation, but has drawn upon a research base wherever possible, as well as the knowledge of experienced academic development and teaching staff. The following sections describe the broad project plan.

### **Project Plan**

#### **1. Identify relevant teaching evaluation research literature.**

There is a vast amount of research on teaching evaluation in different teaching contexts, including specific dimensions of teaching which are associated with student learning outcomes. Of particular importance in this phase were meta-analyses of the teaching evaluation literature. There have been several meta-analyses of the multisection validity study research literature (e.g. Cohen, 1981; Feldman, 1989). These have uniformly found moderate to strong

correlations between overall teacher or course ratings and student achievement, supporting claims for the validity of overall student evaluations of teaching.

The above research literature largely focuses on the learning in traditional contexts such as lecture/tutorial settings. For some intended FFT instruments, such as Teaching in Clinic; Teaching at a Distance, and Teaching with e-Learning, more focussed teaching evaluation research literatures were drawn upon.

#### **2. Develop items with a focus on the student's experience of the teacher.**

Many teaching evaluation instruments are worded in ways that focus on judgments of the teacher, rather than the student's experience of the teaching, and how that experience is related to student learning. A core assumption of student learning research (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 2003) is that it is students' perceptions of the teaching environment which affect their approaches to learning, rather than an objective appraisal of that environment. Where possible then, items are worded in the first person, and emphasise the students' personal experience of teaching.

A crucial part of the design of each instrument which will allow teachers to focus on the variation in students' learning experiences is the use of space for comment on each item, rather than simply a space for overall comments. Using this method will allow staff to "triangulate" quantitative results for each item with qualitative feedback. This avoids the common problem with numerical ratings faced by teachers, of why students give high, middling or low ratings with respect to a given facet of teaching. This design decision will bring the design of the FFT surveys in line with the USE. The ITL has had considerable feedback that this mixture of qualitative and quantitative feedback is of considerable assistance in unravelling the variation in

students' experiences within a given unit of study. For an extended discussion of teaching evaluation from a student-focussed perspective, see Ramsden and Dodds (1989).

### **3. Iterative peer review and consultation with stakeholders.**

Following initial item development, discussions were held with ITL academic developers with expertise in

Lectures, Teaching in Tutorials, and Teaching with e-Learning surveys found students were able to provide meaningful feedback to their teachers using the surveys. The teachers also responded positively to the format of the surveys (ratings plus comments).

The new FFT surveys will be made available to all teaching staff from semester 1 2006. Teaching staff

instructional dimensions and student achievement: Refining and extending the synthesis of data from multisection validity studies. *Research in Higher Education*, 30, 583-645.

Gibbs, G., Habeshaw, S., & Habeshaw, T. (1988). *53 interesting ways to appraise your teaching*. Bristol: Technical and Educational Services.

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**Many teaching evaluation instruments are worded in ways that focus on judgments of the teacher, rather than the student's experience of the teaching, and how that experience is related to student learning.**

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quality assurance and/or specific teaching contexts (e.g. e-Learning). These discussions covered the breadth of the item coverage, and the "face validity" of the items; that is, the extent to which an item was clearly recognisable as a meaningful indicator of teaching quality for a particular context. These staff provided suggestions for contacting faculty-based staff and/or committees with teaching-context-specific expertise (e.g. Faculty tutor reference groups), who were then contacted and asked for their comments and suggestions.

The input of two such working groups – the ICT in Teaching and Learning group, and the Evaluation and Quality Assurance (EQA) group – was invited, regarding item wording and coverage. Discussions with the former group were of particular importance in developing the Teaching with e-Learning FFT survey.

Members of the EQA working group were asked for contact details of student representatives in their respective faculties. These students were contacted by email and asked for their comments on the various surveys. Draft FFT surveys were also piloted in selected units of study during the University's Summer Session. Pilot tests of the Teaching in

can order the surveys through the FFT website (<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/FEEDBACK/orderSF.cfm>). Please note that the Feedback for Teachers service is a confidential service for individual teachers. It is not permitted for staff to make orders on behalf of other staff members, e.g. a head of school cannot order a survey for a lecturer; a lecturer cannot order surveys for tutors working for them. It is the responsibility of individual teachers to order surveys for themselves.

We thank all the staff and students who contributed to the development of these surveys and hope that they will be helpful to all staff who wish to reflect upon and improve their teaching and their students' learning. If you would like to discuss the surveys, or talk about alternative methods of teaching evaluation, please call Paul Ginns on (02) 9351 3607.

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**Paul Ginns** manages the University survey processes, and **Simon Barrie** leads the University's EQA Project. Their research explores research-based and institutionally aligned teaching evaluation systems. Visit each of their web pages at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/aboutus/paulginns.htm>, or <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/aboutus/simonbarrie.htm>.

Paul and Simon work with the Evaluation and Quality Assurance (EQA) Working Group <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/EQA/> to help improve student learning at the University of Sydney. Your faculty's representative on the Working Group can help you with questions about your Faculty's policies on, and priorities in, teaching evaluation. You can read more about the EQA Working Group at <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/EQA/>. For a complete list of Faculty representatives, visit <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/EQA/reprs.cfm>.

If you would like to talk more with Paul about this work, you can contact him at: [P.Ginns@itl.usyd.edu.au](mailto:P.Ginns@itl.usyd.edu.au)

# T&L snapshots



## **Carrick Awards 2006**

The national Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education offers three different awards (1) Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning; (2) Teaching Excellence; (3) Programs that Enhance Learning.

The university received 8 citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning.

### **Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning**

#### **Arts**

Dr Stephen Robertson

#### **Conservatorium of Music**

Dr Diane Collins

#### **Economics & Business**

Dr Ahmani Ahmed & Dr Rosina Mladenovic with Dr Tai Peseta (ITL)

#### **Education & Social Work**

Dr Lesley Scanlon

#### **Health Sciences**

Dr Kate O'Loughlin, Fran Everingham, Dr Gary Lee, Stuart Newman (Nursing and Midwifery) and Maureen Ahern (Nursing and Midwifery).

Associate Professor Michelle Lincoln, Dr Sue McAllister, Associate Professor Alison Ferguson and Associate Professor Lindy McAllister

#### **Veterinary Science**

Associate Professor Jennifer Hodgson & Dr Jacqui Norris

Hannah Forsyth, Dr Jenny-Ann Toribio, Professor Richard Whittington, Meg Vos

The following colleagues were forwarded as the university's nominees for the latter categories. The recipients will be announced later in the year.

### **Teaching Excellence**

#### **Biological Sciences, Health and Related Studies**

(including Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Medicine, Nursing, etc)  
Assoc Prof Rosanne Taylor

#### **Law, Economics, Business and Related Studies**

Prof Frank Stilwell

#### **Humanities and the Arts**

Dr Gaynor Macdonald

#### **Physical Sciences and Related Studies**

(including Architecture, Building and Planning, Engineering, Computing and Information Science)  
Dr Tom Hubble

#### **Social Sciences**

(including Education)  
Dr Lyn Carson

**Indigenous Education**, for receipt of Neville Bonner Award/s  
Ms Sally Farrington and Ms Sue Page

#### **Early Career**

Dr Neal Peres Da Costa

### **Programs that Enhance Learning**

#### **The First Year Experience**

Arts Network Mentoring Program  
Dr Nerida Jarkey

#### **Postgraduate Education**

PReSS – Postgraduate Research Students' Society, Northern Clinical School, RNSH

#### **Innovations in Curricula, Learning and Teaching**

Office of Teaching and Learning in Medicine – common first year Medicine/Dentistry  
Assoc Prof Chris Roberts

#### **Flexible Learning and Teaching**

USyd eLearning  
Dr Rob Ellis

#### **Services Supporting Student Learning**

Scaffolding Literacy  
Dr David Rose

#### **Educational Partnerships and Collaborations with other Organisations**

Year 5 Extramural Support Team, Faculty of Veterinary Science  
Dr John Baguley

Further information about Carrick Awards available at:  
<http://www.carrickinstitute.edu.au>





### ***Vice-Chancellor's Awards 2006***

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#### **Outstanding Teaching**

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##### **Economics and Business**

Early Career Award:

Guiseppa Carabetta

##### **Education and Social Work**

Dr Donna O'Connor

##### **Health Sciences**

Dr Mary Jane Mahony

##### **Science**

Dr Manjula Sharma

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#### **Support of the Student Experience**

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##### **Arts Mentoring Network Program**

Dr Nerida Jarkey

##### **Koori Centre Web Presence**

Deborah Kirby-Parsons & Curtis Flood, Koori Centre

##### **Australian Physiotherapy Association**

University of Sydney Group  
Student: Roxanne Healey

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#### **Excellence in Research Higher Degree Supervision**

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#### **University Awards**

##### **Health Sciences**

Prof Mark Onslow

##### **Nursing & Midwifery**

A/Prof Robyn Overall

#### **Science**

Dr Maureen Boughton

#### **CHASS AWARD**

#### **Arts**

Dr Carole Cusack

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#### **NSW Minister for Education and Training & The Australian College of Educators Quality Teaching Awards**

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Each year the Australian College of Education together with the New South Wales Department of Education sponsor Quality Teaching Awards. University educators are eligible for these awards. The Quality Teaching Awards recognize and applaud accomplished teaching. Over the years ten members of the University of Sydney have received these prestigious awards. The application process for these awards is very rigorous. It includes a detailed but short portfolio, letters of nomination, class room visits, and interviews with students. The aim of the award is to learn from the example of outstanding teachers. A link to the web site is below. While the University has encouraged its teachers to seek such recognition, it has never been able to promote or support applicants. In light of that fact it is all the more remarkable that eleven individuals have succeeded in the process. Their names are listed below. Congratulations to each and every one of them!

To recognize their achievement and to encourage others to apply the Institute for Teaching and Learning recently organized a meeting with the recipients. In discussion they kindly agreed to constitute them-

selves as a network, to advise and support others in considering an application. To some extent each of them has been doing that individually, but that effort will now gain greater visibility and co-ordination. The Network will feature on the Institute's web site in the near future. Those who attended the meeting also agreed to offer a panel discussion about learning through the application process at an alumni Chapter event on 1 September.

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#### **Members of the University of Sydney who have received a Quality Teaching Award are:**

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##### **Chemistry**

Dr Adrian George

A/Prof Anthony Masters

##### **Education and Social Work**

Dr Robyn Ewing

Dr Michael Anderson

##### **Government**

Dr Lyn Carson

##### **Geosciences**

Dr Thomas Hubble

##### **Pharmacy**

Erica Sainsbury

##### **Sciences and Technology**

Dr Mary Peat

##### **Veterinary Science**

Dr Michelle Hyde

Dr Paul McGreevy

For further information visit:  
<http://www.austcolled.com.au>



Helen Wozniak and Mary Jane Mahony

## Show me an example!

Mary Jane Mahony and Helen Wozniak  
The College of Health Sciences  
eLearning Resources Centre

One outcome of the increased promotion of elearning at the University, as one of a suite of strategies to support and improve learning, has been the emergence of statements from colleagues such as 'I don't know what the possibilities are, 'I don't' know what I don't know', 'Can I have a look at some examples that illustrate elearning in my field?' The Health Sciences eLearning Resource Centre was a strategic response by the then College of Health Sciences through its eLearning Working Group to meet this voiced need. How were the examples identified and selected? The development project

commenced with a series of focus groups with both experienced and inexperienced users of elearning. This consultation assisted in making explicit the issues that staff had about the design or use of elearning techniques. The focus groups also helped the project group to identify six key teaching and learning components in health science education that were used to locate the exemplar materials (see Figure 1).

A key principle in selecting the examples was that most would be pedagogically and technically accessible by any university teacher with basic WebCT skills. Few examples

make use of 'high tech' solutions. All are solidly grounded in good educational design. Key attributes were direct relevance to university teachers in the health sciences and minimal barriers to perceived usability.

The exemplar materials provide the 'story' behind the elearning development from the eyes of the university teacher who developed the example. This includes user-friendly commentary on the pedagogical and technical aspects of the example. Each example includes a description of the context or problem providing the impetus for using elearning techniques and the solution developed. The experience of the university teacher involved is also described to illustrate which aspects of the example worked, and what further issues arose.

The stories told with most of the examples make the case for relative advantage as seen by designers and users. For example:

### Use the WebCT bookmark

This online suite of examples is available to all staff in the University through WebCT on <http://develop-on-line.usyd.edu.au/> via an institutional bookmark (on the right hand-side of the screen after login). Contact the WebCT helpdesk with your UniKey if you are unable to log in to WebCT or you are unable to access the bookmark.

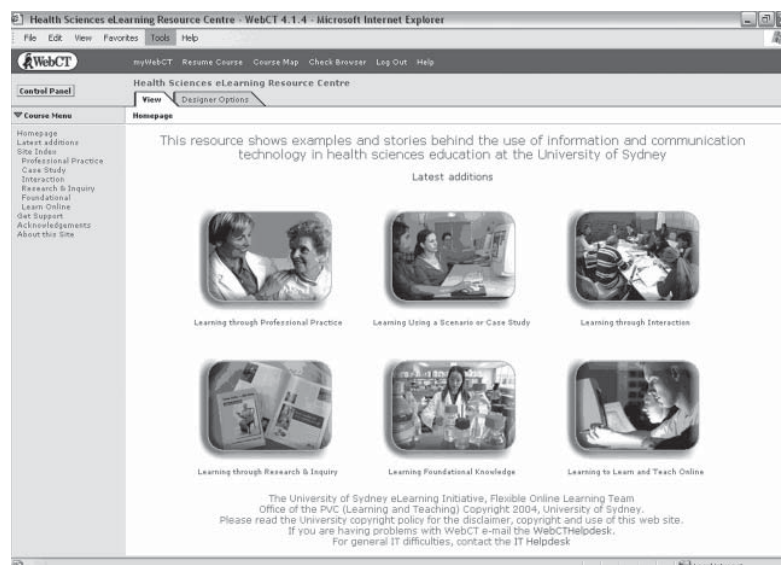


Figure 1: Homepage of the Health Sciences eLearning Resource Centre

- Increased opportunity for interactive small group learning experiences is achieved through replacing some traditional lectures with online modules (Learning Foundational Knowledge: Replacing face to face lectures with online modules)
- A positive effect on staff workload is achieved by replacing several small group face-to-face case discussion tutorials with one online asynchronous discussion open to all students to share their cases, thus reducing the timetabled commitments of the lecturer and shifting some of the teaching-learning responsibilities to the students (Learning through Interaction: Learning by reporting and discussing clinical cases)
- Where several units of study have overlapping materials (standard and advanced components) and are taught by several different academics a WebCT site can be used to co-ordinate all the learning materials. Depending on student enrolment each student can be given access only to the materials required. This means that instead of constructing several sites, one for each unit of study, all materials can be contained in one site making management easier (Learning Foundational Knowledge: One website for coordinating multiple units of study).

Twenty-one different examples were initially collected from within the University of Sydney with a further four from other institutions; links to outside websites with further examples were also provided. This is an evolving resource: built into the initial strategic project was the opportunity that as further useful examples come to light, they are added to the site (and flagged – 'Latest Additions'). During 2005 seven additional examples were added with some that link to full

working examples (see: Learning Using a Case Study or Scenario: Templates to enhance the clinical reasoning process for allied health professions and also Learning through Interaction: Experiencing Interprofessional Collaboration - Roundtable Discussion described in another Synergy article in this issue). An index has also been added so it is now possible to quickly identify entries that use similar elearning methods.

The Health Sciences eLearning Resource is regularly visited by both returnees and new visitors. Use is, however, less than would be expected given the strength of the expressed need for useable examples to which it was a response. Meeting the call by busy academics for examples and guidelines on ways of improving student learning and, perhaps, ameliorating workload, through use of elearning strategies is a continuing challenge.

The eLearning Resource Centre was a joint project between CHS and the Office of the PVC (Learning & Teaching) as a strategic initiative under the umbrella of USyd eLearning. It represented a 'middle-out' approach recently described by Cummings, Phillips, Lowe & Tilbrook (2005) linking policy developments with teaching and learning at the coalface in both communication and action and focused on meeting the needs of the 'early majority' (Rogers 2003) of academic staff.

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**Mary Jane Mahony** is Director, Education Connections and Senior Lecturer in Distance & Flexible Education, in the Faculty of Health Sciences. She was chair of the College of Health Sciences eLearning Working Group 2004-2006 and is currently the eLearning representative for the faculty. Her interest is in providing flexibility for learners, not only in time and place but also in learning activities and resources which respond to learner differences in learning purpose, context, preferences and needs.

**Helen Wozniak** is a project manager in the Flexible Online Learning Team with responsibility for the University's faculties concerned with the human health sciences. Prior to joining FOLT Helen was a Lecturer in orthoptics at the Faculty of Health Sciences. She has a particular interest in the purposeful use of online discussions.

The vision for this site was created by the 2004 College of Health Sciences eLearning Working Group led by Dr Mary Jane Mahony. The original development project was conducted by Helen Wozniak and members of the Flexible Online Learning Team (Tim Lever, Jenny Pizzica, Stephen Sheely, Mary Helen Ward & Lyn Melville) under the oversight of the CHS eLearning Working Group. The numerous contributors to the CHS eLearning Resource Centre are acknowledged in the website. For information about other USyd eLearning projects go to <http://www.usyd.edu.au/webct/projects/index.shtml>



## **Giving our students a "voice": discussion, reflection & interaction in teaching and learning**

Jennifer O'Dea, Faculty of Education & Social Work

In writing about the role of discussion and the notion of giving students a "voice" I am reminded of my experience as a Masters student at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1986 I packed up and moved to California to undertake a Masters in Public Health in Health Education. With two degrees already under my belt and two years experience as a nutrition educator, I felt pretty academically accomplished at the ripe old age of 26. What I experienced in my classes at UC Berkeley absolutely astounded me!

I was enrolled in a health education theory class with 15 bright young students from around the US and the globe. The class ran from 12-3 pm on a Wednesday afternoon and the WHOLE class was based on student discussion. Students were assigned a few readings which we came to class to discuss - for three whole hours! I was (for the first time in my academic life) totally dumbfounded. Paralyzed with fear, confusion, intimidation and a surprisingly powerful sense of self-consciousness about my Aussie accent, I was unable to utter a sound in class. The fact that 20 percent of my grade was based on "Discussion" made me even more hesitant to speak. In addition to the complete lack of structure to the so-called discussion, the dysfunctional classroom dynamics allowed two male students to regularly and almost totally dominate the discussion (one a stereotypically loud Texan, the other a sassy New Yorker) and this made my plight even more hopeless. I received a B minus for the class and felt lucky to pass - not only because I couldn't effectively engage in the form of discussion on

offer but also because I ended up avoiding several classes out of sheer performance anxiety, intimidation, self consciousness and frustration. Eventually, some other disgruntled students asked the lecturer to first give a brief lecture to outline the main points from the readings in order to produce a more structured discussion and this change eventually led to a more logical and orderly discussion of the readings and the theories at hand. I learnt virtually nothing in that course and it wasn't until several years later that I realized my inability to grasp the theories at hand was not due to my own failure to learn, but the lecturer's failure to teach. I vowed to never teach (or NOT teach) my classes like that and I was motivated to become a more effective teacher.

I have never forgotten this dreadful learning experience and this adverse learning environment, and it has certainly inspired me to learn about and implement well-structured and well-managed classroom discussion in my own lectures and tutorials.

### **Benefits of Discussion**

The many benefits of engaging students in discussion and giving them a "voice" are indisputable. Classic writings by Brookfield and Preskill (1999:3) describe discussion as promoting not only student learning but human growth:-

"Discussion is one of the best ways to nurture human growth because it is premised on the idea that only through collaboration and cooperation with others can we be exposed to new points of

view. This exposure increases our understanding and renews our motivation to continue learning. In the process, our democratic instincts are confirmed: by giving the floor to as many different participants as possible, collective wisdom emerges that would have been impossible for any of the participants to achieve on their own."

Brookfield and Preskill go on to encompass several different aspects of discussion by blending and synthesizing many different notions of "discussion, dialogue, and conversation". They define discussion as "an alternately serious and playful effort by a group of two or more to share views and engage in mutual and reciprocal critique" (1999:5).

The purpose of discussion, state Brookfield and Preskill are fourfold. Discussion can (and should):

1. Help participants reach a more critically informed understanding about the topic or topics under consideration
2. Enhance participants' self-awareness and their capacity for self-critique,
3. Foster an appreciation among participants for the diversity of opinion that invariably emerges when viewpoints are exchanged openly and honestly, and
4. Act as a catalyst to helping people take informed action in the world.

This important function of critical discussion was identified earlier by C. Wright Mills in 1959 when he observed that autobiographically grounded critical discussion allows people to discern between private troubles and public issues.

"By reinterpreting personal difficulties as dimensions of broader social and political trends, we realize that our problems are not always idiosyncratic and due to our personal failings. Also we are better able to generate strate-



gies for counteracting the most dehumanizing, alienating, and oppressive tendencies of modern society.” (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999: 6).

The last point, referring to the socio-political function of discussion as a transformative catalyst for social or political change is a teaching and learning perspective that I find extremely useful and relevant in teaching about issues in health education. As Henry Giroux (1987) quite succinctly points out, critical discussion is a process in which teachers become transformative intellectuals who engage and empower their students to probe the contradictions and injustices of the larger society.

In this way, our teaching can and should, change the world. Paulo Freire's philosophy of the “progressive educator” is embedded in the notion of overturning “the culture of silence”. He posits that every human being no matter how “ignorant” or submerged in the culture of silence, is capable of looking critically at the work in a dialogical encounter with others. Then, provided with the proper tools for this encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, and become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality and deal critically with it. (Freire, 1998: 14).

Therefore, as teachers, our role is to structure our classes in order to promote discussion, critique and reflection. Thereby giving students the opportunity to become more involved in their own learning process.

Engaging in critically informed, rich and diverse “discussion, dialogue and conversation” about the enormous disparities in health status among indigenous and non indigenous Australians is an example of how I use this form of discussion-based interactive education to facilitate student learning at several different levels. Students learn by expanding their own capacity of

thought around such issues; they learn by listening to several other points of view and they learn by having to talk about potential solutions to the problems at hand.

The benefits of learning that results from well-managed discussion are outlined below.

1. It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.
2. It increases students' awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity.
3. It helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions.
4. It encourages attentive, respectful listening.
5. It develops new appreciation for continuing differences.
6. It increases intellectual agility.
7. It helps students become connected to a topic.
8. It shows respect for students' voices and experiences.
9. It helps students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.
10. It affirms students as co creators of knowledge.

## Is all Discussion Democratic?

Although the many benefits of using discussion are well-documented, there is a danger in presuming that discussion methods automatically build on the principles of participatory, active learning for all students. As my American experience as a graduate student illustrates, unsupervised and disorganized discussions run the risk of being dominated by one or two voices; intimidating, silencing and disengaging more reticent students; encroaching on cultural sensitivities and straying into irrelevant territory.

Often teachers have a particular image of an ideal discussion session. For example, that of a conversation in which the teacher says very little because students are talking so much. There is little silence in the room. What conversation there is focuses on relevant issues, and the level of discourse is suitably sophisticated. This sense may be justified. However, by standing back and not intervening in the conversation, we have allowed the reinforcement of differences of status existing in the wider society (Brookfield, 1995:12) and, most importantly,

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**... our teaching can and should, change the world.  
Paulo Freire's philosophy of the "progressive  
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overturning "the culture of silence".**

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11. It develops the capacity for the clear communication of ideas and meaning.
12. It develops habits of collaborative learning.
13. It increases breadth and makes students more empathetic.
14. It helps students develop skills of synthesis and integration.
15. It leads to transformation.

(Brookfield & Preskill, 1999:17).

we have failed to contribute to the discussion ourselves as we have not shared our own point of view. As educators, it is important that we also participate in the learning activities and that we demonstrate that every individual has a right and an opportunity to contribute to the discussion at hand.

The balance of power in discussion groups is not to be ignored. Freire (1998) and Brookfield (1995) both point out that when discussion groups form, they reflect power

dynamics, and communicative inequities in the larger society. Classrooms are not limpid, tranquil ponds, cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life. They are contested spaces - whirlpools containing the contradictory crosscurrents of struggles for material superiority and ideological legitimacy that exist in the world outside. (Brookfield, 1995:9). Being skilled enough to "balance" the power in discussion groups is something that develops over time as we educators become better facilitators of discussion and better managers of time.

Sharing thoughts and feelings through group discussion can present some problems. Boud and Walker (1998) state that "in some cultures the expression of thoughts and feelings to relative strangers is problematic" (200). They also identify another general area of concern. "When learners are required to provide personal information to staff, there is a greater potential for the misuse of power" (195). I can certainly relate to this last point from my experience in California, as I knew quite well that if I opened my mouth in any of those dreadful Wednesday afternoon discussion classes I would surely be exposed. Better to be silent and unknown than to expose the fact that I hadn't a clue about any of the health theories being "discussed".

In addition to class, race and gender, inequity can also result from differ-

ences in individual learning styles and past educational experiences. For example, quieter students, those with poor English skills or introverts may need to first process information before becoming involved in the discussion. Opportunities may need to be created by the teacher before class online, via email to students, or during class to involve reticent students at a later stage in the discussion or as the discussion progresses.

Brookfield (1987) also highlights the tightrope educators walk when asking questions during discussion to assist students to further scrutinize their assumptions and explore alternative ways of thinking and acting.

"We should take pains to ensure that the challenging questions are not posed in ways that threaten the fundamental integrity of individuals. If leaving is not an option... they will mentally disengage from what is happening" (p. 72).

Thus, the teacher may need to intervene to create a structured opportunity for all group members to say something. It is very important to note here that students can become involved in the discussion in non-verbal ways. Students can write their comments or anonymously convey their opinions in several ways that do not have to involve speaking in front of the whole class. I outline some of these non-verbal ways of participating in discussion later in this article.

Teaching democratically and promoting discussion certainly does not mean that we cease to speak authoritatively or that we pretend to be exactly the same as our students. What it does mean is that we make an effort to create conditions under which all voices can speak and be heard (including our own) and in which educational processes are seen to be open to genuine negotiation (Brookfield, 1995: 45).

## Facilitating 'a voice' for all

In order to facilitate discussion that provides 'a voice' for all we must first critically reflect on our teaching practice. Critical reflection urges us to create conditions under which each person is respected, valued, and heard. In pedagogic terms, this means the creation of democratic classrooms. (Brookfield, 1995: 27) Critically reflective teaching happens when we identify and scrutinize the assumptions that underpin how we work. The critically reflective process happens when teachers discover and examine their assumptions by viewing their practice through four distinct, though interconnecting, lenses. These are (1) our autobiographies as teachers and learners, (2) our student's eyes, (3) our colleagues' experiences and (4) theoretical literature. (Brookfield, 1995).

As teachers we first need to model our own commitment to the process of democratic discussion. "Educators should declare their values, assumptions and biases from the beginning and to make a critical examination of their validity a central part of the educational activity." (Brookfield, 1987: 66). By demonstrating an openness to alternative viewpoints a teacher encourages students to do likewise.



It is important to work with students to create ground rules for democratic discourse that correct, as much as possible, for the inequities of race, class, and gender that are inevitably imported into the group from the wider society.

Teachers need to react to the many contextual natures of each discussion. This could be knowing when to encourage conflicts to come out in the open within a group, or when to quiet an overly domineering member, or how to frame critical questions in terms that can be understood and will not threaten self-esteem (Brookfield, 1987:73).

Strategies like attending closely to student's verbal and nonverbal behaviours, using a variety of small and large group discussions and constantly monitoring student engagement and participation all assist in the facilitation of a more democratic, balanced and successful discussion.

### **Strategies for implementing discussion in class**

Following are some of the strategies that I have used to implement greater student involvement in discussion in my health education classes among trainee physical and health education teachers.

#### **Questioning**

I constantly ask very simple questions during lectures and tutorials to stimulate discussion about the topic at hand. Eg "What do you think about that?", "So how do you think that sort of idea would work in a real life situation?", "Can anyone give me an example of an experience they have had that illustrates this point?"

This activity not only stimulates discussion about the material being covered on the day of the class but it also demonstrates and role models the fact that the students themselves should be constantly framing questions around the material that they are learning.

At times it is more pertinent to ask more challenging or probing questions to enable students to further explore personal and societal values and assumptions. E.g. "How does this relate to cultural values or social norms?"

#### **Providing Written Lecture Notes**

Students are given access to lecture notes via WebCT prior to the lecture or tutorial and they are encouraged to print the lecture notes and simply make brief points during the lecture. This enables more time for discussion and less time required for note taking. Students are also given key research papers to read before lectures to become more familiar with the topics being discussed. Access to research papers are via Web CT with direct link to the library or as a hard copy of the paper. This enables them to more fully participate in discussion. In tutorials there is no note taking at all. Students are given a "working" copy of handouts and all relevant materials, group activities, games and quizzes during each tutorial. They are also given a "master copy" for their future teaching portfolios.

#### **Personal Experiences - "Lucky Dip" activity**

Students are asked to think about the relevance of their own personal experiences and those of other students and how these experiences relate to what is currently being learned in class. For example, students in tutorials about adolescent growth, development and body image are asked to take a piece of paper and anonymously write their gender; the most potent memory of their own physical growth during puberty, how old they were and how they felt at the time. All of the pieces of paper are folded, placed in a hat or a box or a plastic bag and each student gets to draw one piece. Each student reads the personal account of another student (who remains anonymous) and is asked to comment on "What do you think about that student's experience?" Additional discussion

questions include "Do you think the student's gender made a difference to their experience?" and "How might this experience relate to your role as future physical and health education teachers?"

#### **Vote with your "feet" activity**

Students' opinions, beliefs and attitudes about various health issues are explored and then discussed, expanded and justified by using an activity that helps them to decide where they stand on certain issues and provides a platform on which to further investigate their reasons for taking this position. The lecturer or tutor makes a set of cardboard decision cards including "Strongly Agree"; "Agree"; "Undecided"; "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". Cards are placed in diametrically opposed positions on the classroom wall using Blu-tak or sticky tape. When the statements are read aloud by the lecturer, students must select a point of view by walking to the card that most reflects their opinion. Statements in my health education classes include examples such as "Condoms should be freely available in schools", "All teachers should be required to quit smoking" and "Psychological health status is not as important as physical health status". When students have made their decision, the lecturer asks "Was it difficult to make your decision? Why or why not?", "Are any of you surprised by the decisions made by others?" "After hearing the discussion and the arguments for and against, do any of you now want to change your position?"

#### **Case Studies and Problem-based Situations**

For example, student work is assessed by assigning them to work in pairs to assess a case study of an adolescent's overall health status including aspects of physical, psychological, social and spiritual health. Use of "real" cases that have been selected and researched by the students themselves makes this activity much more relevant and powerful than having the lecturer write up hypothetical cases. Case studies are presented



in tutorial groups with discussion prompts from the tutor such as “Do you think the adolescent's gender/culture/religion/social class/ family background etc influences his/her health status?” or “Do you think this is a typical picture of an adolescent boy/girl living in Australia today?” Discussion is always directed back to the topic of how students will implement these experiences in their own teaching practice.

### Site Visits

Students work in pairs or small groups to investigate community health related topics and issues in real life settings and in the community by selecting a site visit. Students select topics such as mental health services, nutrition education organizations, health promotion agencies and organize their own site visits. A standardized list of discussion topics and questions are brainstormed and finalized by the whole class group. Site visit presentations and discussions of each site visit are made in tutorials and compose part of the course assessment.

### Group construction of assessment criteria for case study and site visit presentations

Tutorial groups are asked to think about, discuss and finally agree upon the appropriate assessment criteria for their in-class presentations. This activity certainly gives the students a “voice” in how they will be assessed but also helps them to discuss the relative importance of each of the assessment criteria. (The assessment instrument is available from the author upon request)

### Group puzzles

Students work in pairs or small groups to solve a puzzle about how to construct categories of illicit, prescription and over the counter drugs, their characteristics, effects etc. Groups then discuss how they solved the puzzle and why they chose to categorize the drugs in a certain way. Students become

involved in wide discussion about drug facts, legal implications, risk and harm minimization and their own beliefs, attitudes and values. Summary discussion reflects on the students learning experiences during the activity eg. “Did you find it easy to decide on how to complete the puzzle?” “What stopped you solving the puzzle?” “What helped your group to solve the puzzle?”

### Summary

Involving our students in discussion and allowing them to have a “voice” is not something that comes naturally to some teachers. As Paulo Freire points out, the “culture of silence” is common in educational settings - many of our students have probably learned to be quiet in class and it can take a long time to “unlearn” something like that.

The benefits of discussion in tertiary education are well established, but the potential risks and barriers to productive discussion should also be considered when implementing new teaching and learning strategies. The strategies for encouraging and implementing classroom discussion that I present in this article are techniques that I have developed over my 16 years teaching at the University of Sydney with much success and most importantly, are validated by very positive student feedback in their course evaluations last year -

“I really enjoyed the fact that we were so involved in tutes and you tried to get us all involved in lectures. It's refreshing to have a lecturer who lets us discuss things and doesn't just read out loud and make us scribe! ”

“It was great – she encouraged us to speak, and everyone in the course gave their opinions and it was valued so the students appreciate it.”

“I like this structure, I understand it and I feel that my voice/ opinion are heard”.

“I liked it because all the students were actively involved. It was easy to talk about sensitive issues.”

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**Jennifer O'Dea** is a Senior Lecturer in Health Education and Nutrition Education in the Faculty of Education & Social Work. She has been a member of staff for 17 years and says that she still gets a huge thrill from teaching and interacting with students in lectures, tutorials and in online learning modes. Dr O'Dea is undertaking a number of T&L studies at present including an evaluation of student's knowledge, beliefs, skills and attitudes towards learning with Web CT; a study of student learning using online and face-to-face discussions and a qualitative study of how teacher education students see their roles as “Students”, “Learners” and “Teachers”. She was awarded the Faculty Teaching Excellence Award in 2005. To have a further conversation with Jennifer about her article, contact her at: j.odea@usyd.edu.au

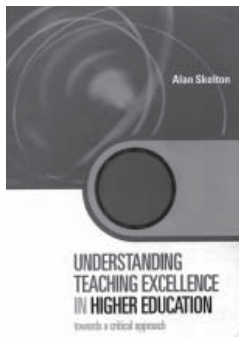


# ■■■■■■■■■ bookshelf

Skelton, A. (2005).

***Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: towards a critical approach.* NY: Routledge.**

Alan Skelton's book has grown out of a funded project designed to assess and evaluate the National Teaching Fellowships Scheme in the UK. Teaching Fellows usually work for a period of time sharing ideas and engaged in collective development activities together. In Australia, the Carrick Awards (previously the Australian Awards for University Teaching) are our national equivalent. Similar schemes exist in Canada (3M Fellows) and North America (Carnegie Scholars). As teaching excellence becomes increasingly demanded, recognised and rewarded internationally, Skelton asks us to revisit what it is we mean by excellence; what it signals about the institutional systems and processes designed to capture it; what sort of claims to quality are embedded in it, particularly in this moment, as the higher education sector is coming to devote more and more resources to the idea of it.



In the *Introduction* to the book, Skelton makes clear his position. The rise and rise of managerialism—its ascendant logics of accountability, audit, efficiency and effectiveness in universities, is influencing what we take teaching excellence to mean. He warns against a notion of teaching excellence that turns “teachers into capable but docile subjects, disciplined by the constant calls for information and endless paper trails (p.6). Following Barnett, he advocates for the sort of excellence which is guided by a ‘critical being’ and that reinstates academics’ professional judgement. Such judgements he argues, are rooted in a form of academic freedom that also takes seriously, academic responsibility.

The book's structure holds up a critical perspective in four parts. The chapters in each part move from a description of current schemes (see *Chapters 3: Awards for Teachers and 4: Institutions and teaching excellence*), to its relation with disciplinary cultures (Chapter 5: The contribution of subject disciplines), to an exploration of the complex relationship between teaching excellence as an individual practice, the ongoing and scholarly nature of professional development (Chapter 9: *Professional development and teaching excellence*) and the field of higher education pedagogical research itself (see *Chapter 11 Research into teaching excellence in higher education*). In doing so, his message is a simple one. It is this: that we need to reclaim a personal meaning of teaching excellence that is supported by a commitment to the values of reflection, scholarship, professionalism, and that these are the logics which must define the tasks, activities and initiatives designed to recognise and reward our work as teachers. This must also be the sort of work which invites us to shift our understandings of teaching excellence beyond individual performance, towards a teaching and learning project that is socially informed and politically astute. **Tai Peseta**

Brew, A. (2006).

***Research and Teaching: Beyond the Divide.* NY: Palgrave MacMillan.**

The increasing attention given over to exploring the relationship between research and teaching in higher education, makes Angela Brew's book a welcome contribution to the discussion. The book opens with a compelling case about why research and teaching should be more closely aligned. Simply put, she argues that it is the basis for an inquiry-based higher education. “If we are going to prepare students for an unpredictable future; a future where they will have to solve problems that we cannot at this moment even dream of, then they need to develop the skills of inquiry... (p.xiv).” Brew suggests, that our understanding of how to do this depends on our conception of teaching, research, knowledge and scholarship. It also depends on the sort of structural and organisational arrangements designed to encourage and reward it.



Staged in three parts, *Part 1: Exploring the Research and Teaching Relationship* provides a conceptual map of the terrain itself. It draws on Boyer and the work of the Carnegie Foundation, together with the work carried out in international contexts to unpack how we understand what is possible about developing research-enhanced teaching in undergraduate education.

In *Part 2: The Domains of Research-Enhanced Education*, Brew introduces us to the notion of ‘inclusive scholarly building knowledge communities’ taken from the work of Carl Bereiter. In the various chapters here, Brew invites us to think hard on the ways in which the organisation of curricula continues to exclude students from participation in, and contribution to authentic academic communities. She provides numerous examples of research-enhanced education from across globe that attempt to bridge that divide—for instance the IT/design teacher who has organised a unit of study to mirror the processes of an academic conference. The range of examples is one of the book's highlights. Each acts as a stimulus for thinking about and revisiting our assumptions about what is possible in the curriculum design of our units and course degree programs.

The various chapters that constitute the final section *Part 3: Going Beyond the Divide* suggest that this work points us to a restructuring of the university. Working with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity, Brew argues that thinking more seriously about the relationship between research and teaching necessarily leads to a reconceptualisation of the hierarchies and forms of capital that structure academic life—what she refers to as ‘academic apartheid’. It's an idea that transcends a simple understanding of both research and teaching. In fact, what Brew does successfully in the book is that she invites us not only to reconsider the nature of the communities and disciplinary areas in which we labour, but to ask how we might support students to form new communities of practice. **Tai Peseta**

# profile

## Jennifer Hodgson

Faculty of Veterinary Science  
Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)



Jennie travels between the Camden and City campuses of the Faculty of Veterinary Science often four times per week. It is a journey she now knows quite intimately since completing her undergraduate degree in the faculty. Following her doctoral work in North America, Jennie briefly taught at Washington State University before returning to Sydney University where she spent the first 8 years of her academic career at the Camden campus, teaching final year veterinary students diagnostic pathology and microbiology. This teaching focused on further developing the student's problem solving skills and involved small groups.

It is only in the last 5 years, since moving to an appointment on the city campus, that she has been able to participate in, contribute to, and help develop learning and teaching more systematically. Although she now predominantly teaches large groups she uses the same interactive approach as for small groups, encouraging the students to be active participants in their learning. Before taking on her current role as Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Jennie acted as Sub-Dean in this discipline. Now, alongside a set of committed Sub-Deans, she oversees a new committee structure (Veterinary Science; Animal and Veterinary Bioscience; Animal Husbandry; Postgraduate Coursework; e-Learning) that not only monitors learning and teaching challenges, but that also supports staff to develop their academic leadership capacities. Jennie attributes much of the improvement, innovation and success in the faculty's approach to learning and teaching to the team efforts of these colleagues.

The Faculty of Veterinary Science has long been recognised for its strategic approach to learning and teaching improvement. This year, a number of academics in the faculty (Jennie included) were rewarded with two citations from the national Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. In 2004, with colleague Jacqui Norris, Jennie was a recipient of a Vice-Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Teaching and in 2005, was awarded the Australian Veterinary Association Prize for Excellence in Teaching. Her talents as a teacher and her positive results with students in the classroom, mirrors her success at the faculty level.

As Sub-Dean, Jennie led the successful curriculum accreditation process with the American Veterinary Medical Association. The outcome is that the qualifications of USydney veterinary science graduates are now recognised in North America. Jennie maintains that the supportive feedback the faculty received during the accreditation process was due in large part to the establishment of a common 'language' in which to discuss learning and teaching matters. She says that it is a language which helps to describe what is happening across the faculty, together with recognising and then developing the sorts of systems and processes needed to act on those challenges.

"It helps that so many of our academics have completed the Institute for Teaching and Learning's Graduate Certificate because it acts as a shared experience that has begun to instil an expectation that we work together. It has provided a solid pedagogical basis upon which to make decisions about how to progress. We also have a Professional Leadership Program that's been running for about 4 years and each year, about 20 staff, attend a retreat together. The result of both those programs is that our interactions have become much more collegial. We teach together; we observe each other teach regularly; we offer feedback and critique; we encourage introspection and reflection – and our students see and respond to that. We work in teams to improve our students' learning which fosters a genuine spirit of collegiality. And because we're a relatively small faculty and our students progress in 'year' groups, it becomes easier to encourage a set of instructors, teachers and unit coordinators to meet, in order to discuss critically student feedback or USE results and to think about what the issues are and to develop a process for implementing changes." Clearly, these collaborative efforts are paying off. Not only is the environment more positive for academics in the faculty, Jennie says that "students report feeling more involved in faculty decision making too".

While the faculty reaps the rewards of significant cultural changes, there are still key elements of the student learning experience, that require attention and monitoring. Under Jennie's leadership, the faculty will submit a Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme (TIES) applica-

tion to develop an assessment schema that better evaluates final year vet students' problem-solving skills. The faculty will also work towards streamlining the Year 1 and 2 curricula as a result of Academic Board's policy to standardise units of study to 6 credit points. Strategic priorities aside, there are the usual challenges to contend with too. "Like most faculties, there are economic considerations. The faculty needs to make realistic resourcing decisions so that the world-class standards we set for ourselves and students are maintained. We also need to monitor the demands of our professional bodies and accrediting agencies. The big issue facing us at the moment is globalisation of the profession and the implications for internationalising the curricula. There is an expectation that our graduates ought to be able to work anywhere in the world so we need to consider what that education entails without contributing to an already crowded curriculum. At the same time, there are challenges for the veterinary profession

nationally, such as the shortage of veterinarians working in rural areas. We need to ensure that USyd graduates are well placed to be able to respond to both national and international demands. We also need to be mindful of our staff and balance workloads. We want to provide as many opportunities as possible for our staff to engage in professional development but we have to keep a keen eye on the increasing levels of administration. We also need to ensure that our younger staff members have the time to develop and grow, and not just dump stuff on them. And finally, we need to keep up our levels of energy so that we can "keep all the balls in the air".

For further conversation with Jennie about the learning and teaching initiatives in the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, contact her via email at: [jennih@camden.usyd.edu.au](mailto:jennih@camden.usyd.edu.au)





## **Learning-outcomes approaches to curriculum design and review**

**Dhia Al Bakri**  
Faculty of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources

A learning-outcomes model (LOM) was developed to provide a basis for efficient curriculum design and review of interdisciplinary degree programs. The Bachelor of Land and Water Science (BLWSc) was used as a case study to test the value of LOM. The importance of such conceptual models is the emphasis placed on achieving greater transparency for both teachers and learners and as tools for planning teaching and achieving effective learning outcomes (D'Andrea 1999). In addition, a solid conceptual model would provide a basis for continuous improvement, where the curriculum is continually monitored and improved in incremental steps (Smith et al., 2001). The overall process of curriculum design and review should aim to produce a cohesive, balanced and up to date degree program that is conducive to effective learning.

Given that interdisciplinary degree programs such as the BLWSc are normally developed by incorporating many pre-existing units of study sourced from other programs, there is a particular need to ensure that the curriculum is well rationalized and integrated. Traditionally, curriculum design and review of these degrees is generally carried out by a working party (WP) consisting of several academic staff representing relevant departments and schools. The WP party recommendations are invariably based on reaching some sort of consensus about the proposed study program. The process is largely carried out on an ad hoc basis and tends to be inefficient and time consuming due to the lack of an agreed upon conceptual

framework about learning. This may also be because the members invariably have different perceptions and agendas. Depending on the dynamic and personal politics of the WP, the resultant curriculum is invariably poorly integrated or rationalized and greatly influenced by the teaching agenda with very little emphasis on the desired learning outcomes of the degree.

### **Development of Learning - Outcomes Model (LOM)**

The design of learning experiences in higher education is becoming increasingly outcome-led through rational curriculum planning to the development of expressive outcomes, which includes subject-based, personal transferable and generic academic outcomes. Learning outcomes represent what is formally assessed and accredited to the student and they offer a starting point for a viable design of curricula in higher education (Allan, 1996). The Learning-Outcomes Model reflects a holistic approach to the assessment of outcomes, based upon the values and mission of the institute. The first step in developing this model is the identification of overarching institutional learning outcomes that provide a framework for development of more program-specific learning outcomes. Collectively, the institutional and programmatic learning outcomes inform decisions on learning outcomes at the individual course level. Assessment methods and tools are subsequently designed to measure achievement of these intended institutional, program, and course learning outcomes (Hjelm and Baker 2001).

Learning outcomes are a promise about what students who successfully complete a course or a unit of study will know, understand, or be able to do as a result. The educational importance of this promise is that it focuses on what the students themselves do, not what the tutor or teacher does. When teaching design starts from a foundation of learning outcomes, it is easier to focus on how students will apply what they learn, and it takes into account that learning is about skills as well as knowledge, and it begins to incorporate active learning into courses and sessions (Wareing 2004).

To overcome or minimize the shortcomings of the curriculum design/review process of a given degree, it is imperative that a conceptual model is adopted to guide the various stages of this complex process. The LOM (Figure 1) was developed and used as a framework to conduct a comprehensive, rigorous and efficient review process. The application of LOM should proceed in an integrated and focused way following the steps outlined below:

1. Establish the strategic direction of the degree by clearly stating the aims and learning outcomes of the study program. This step should be guided by the University/Faculty's generic graduate attributes, number and background of the academics in the faculty, perceived demands from, and background of, prospective student population, and professional requirements and industry expectation.
2. Develop a conceptual framework for the degree structure and identify the main study strands. This conceptual framework should accurately reflect the degree aims and objectives and designate a relative weighting for the different study strands. Develop degree structure and identify core and elective units of study within each strand



3. Specify learning outcomes of each study unit which should demonstrate the link between the respective units and the conceptual framework and degree objectives
4. Develop the content of study units guided by the objectives and learning outcomes of the respective units
5. Develop subject delivery strategies for each unit of study that would achieve effective teaching and learning and measure learners' progress and development. Assessment of learning outcomes should be both formative and summative. Formative assessment gives students feedback on their work about how well they are accomplishing the learning outcomes, and helps them adjust their activities; it helps students to do better and gives information about how successful their teaching is. Summative assessment contributes to the course, module or degree result; it produces a mark or a grade. Summative assessment also contributes to the proof that students can do what the course or degree claims that they will be able to do (Wareing 2004).
6. Conduct regular evaluation and review of the study units and degree program. It is imperative that the curriculum review and design seek and incorporate feedback from key stakeholders & take into consideration new developments in respective fields.

### Application of LOM

The Bachelor of Land & Water Science (BLWSc) is an interdisciplinary 4-year degree commenced in 2000 and an internal curriculum review was undertaken during 2003-2004. This review focused mainly on operational and structural aspects of the degree. Due to time and resource constraints, very little analysis was carried out in relation to learning outcomes, content, ratio-

nalization and integration of the units of study. However, the author seized the opportunity to conduct an in depth curriculum review of the degree using the LOM (Figure 1) that was specifically developed for this purpose. The procedure adopted in this review involved:

- analysing background information and historical data
- undertaking informal discussion and consultation with concerned academic staff
- considering formal and informal feedback from current degree students,
- conducting online search of other degrees who offered program similar to the BLWSc. This review covered 17 undergraduate degrees offered in Australia and abroad (e.g. University of Arizona 2003 [www.ag.arizona.edu/swcs/instruction/land\\_water.html](http://www.ag.arizona.edu/swcs/instruction/land_water.html), University of Gloucestershire 2004 [www.glos.ac.uk](http://www.glos.ac.uk), University of Western Australia 2004 [http://admission.uwa.edu.au/undergraduate/courses/html/land\\_and\\_water\\_management](http://admission.uwa.edu.au/undergraduate/courses/html/land_and_water_management)).

The LOM has identified the following main deficiencies in the design of the then existing curricula:

1. Absence of clear reference to the strategic direction of the degree due to lack of statements of aims and learning outcomes. Furthermore, learning outcomes of many units of study were poorly defined and integrated.
2. The degree structure was not supported by an articulated rationale or a conceptual framework. A degree of overlap or

duplication exists in terms of progression and content of some units of study.

3. The degree rationalization and integration was adversely affected by the arbitrary designation of some of the units of study. For instance the biophysical science strand was weighted heavily towards land subjects on the expense of water content. Land-related units accounted for 95 credit points (cp) (50% of the total degree work load, 192 cp). But water-related units accounted for less than 25 cp (13% of the total degree units). Both the remediation technology and socioeconomic strands were underrepresented, accounting for less than 7% and 9% of the total degree units respectively

To overcome some of the above deficiencies, the following recommendations were suggested:

### **Develop degree aims and learning outcomes**

**Aims:** To produce graduates equipped with the necessary knowledge, competency, critical thinking, and skills to work as technical advisers, researchers, managers, or teachers in a variety of situations

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***Learning outcomes are a promise about what students who successfully complete a course or a unit of study will know, understand, or be able to do as a result.***

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related to land and water resources. In addition to the technical ability, the graduates will have empathy and commitment to contribute meaningfully, if opportunities arise, to sustainable development, rehabilitation and remediation of land and water resources.

**Learning outcomes:** On the completion of the degree, the graduates should be able to:

1. apply appropriate scientific methods and techniques to investigate and diagnose causes and effects of land and water degradation and pollution
2. explain the interconnectedness between the biophysical systems and socioeconomic activities within the context of land and water management
3. use models to assess and predict environmental impact of anthropogenic activities on land and water resources at the local, national and international levels
4. apply integrated catchment management strategies and technological solutions to prevent resource degradation and to rehabilitate degraded land and water resources
5. produce and critically analyse scientific data for formulating sound policies and legislation concerning sustainable development and management of land and water resources
6. communicate effectively appropriate technical and scientific advice to land and water users, managers and policy makers.

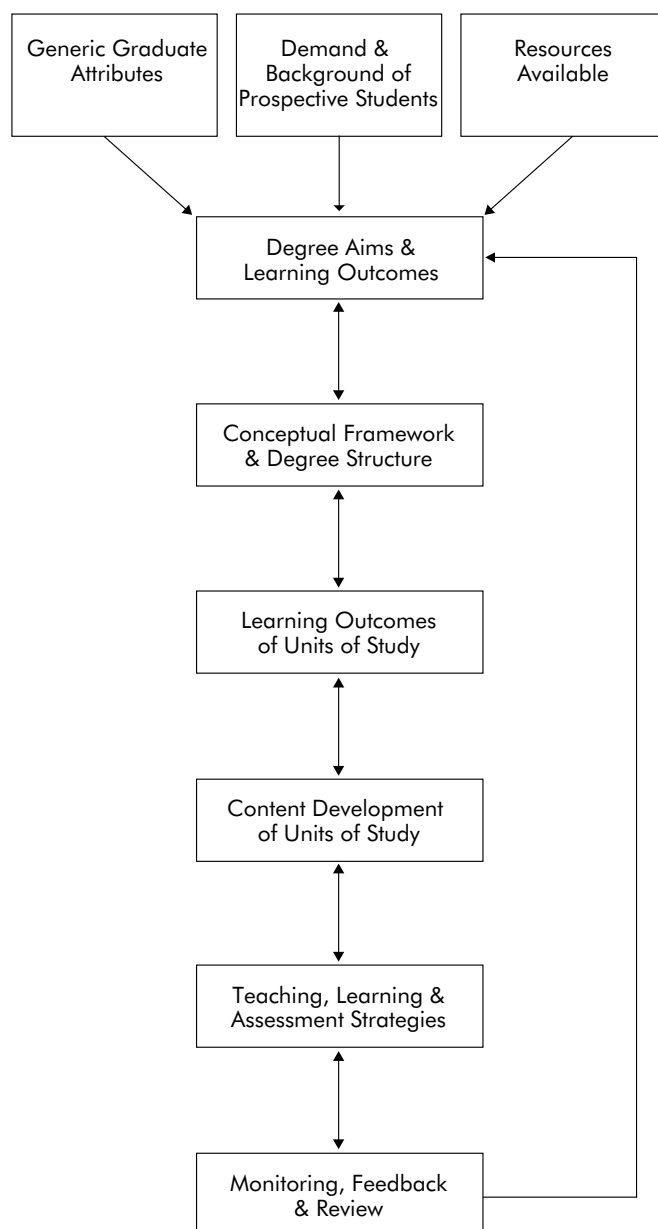


Figure 1. Learning-outcomes model (LOM) for curriculum design and review

### Proposed conceptual framework

To enable students achieve the learning outcomes of this multi-disciplinary degree, it was recommended that the study program should encompass four main strands: Biophysical science strand, remediation technology strand, Socioeconomic strand, and research and integration strand. The flow chart (see Figure 2) shows the areas of study proposed for each strand as well as an indicative weighting of the various strands in terms of their anticipated contribution to the total study load (given as percentages of total study load of 192 credit points). The proposed strands and indicative weighting were developed taking into consideration: Degree aims and learning objectives, total number and background of the academics in the faculty, perceived demands from the professional and student populations, professional requirements if the degree is to be certified (policy), and future development of new technology (Dalton and Wright 1999).

### Degree rationalization and unit integration

The research that was conducted to develop the LOM has revealed that further degree rationalization and integration was required to ensure that the curriculum is consistent with the recommended learning outcomes and conceptual framework; the following improvements could be implemented on an incremental basis:

1. Correct the imbalance in the biophysical science strand which is weighted heavily in favour of the land component on the expense of the water component. This can be achieved by introducing new units/modules focusing on freshwater ecology and biochemistry as well as offering some of the current core land units as optional.
2. Further improve the content and progression of the current

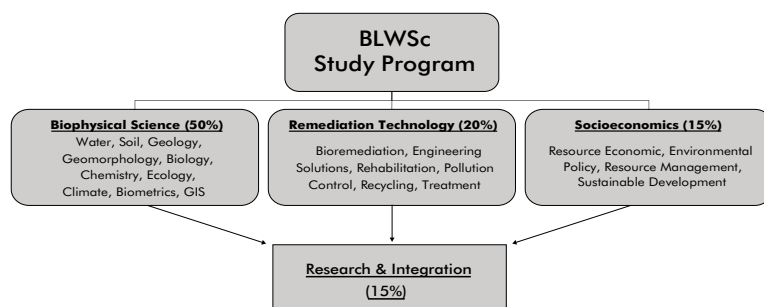


Figure 2. Proposed conceptual framework of the BLWSc degree

- units dealing with surface and ground water hydrology
3. Articulate statements defining the learning outcomes of all the units of study. These statements should be consistent with the degree aims and learning outcomes and used to guide the content development of the units.
  4. Strengthen the remediation technology strand by introducing units or modules dealing with pollution control and rehabilitation technology
  5. Consolidate the socioeconomics strand by offering a core unit/module in resource management.

## Conclusions

The LOM approach provided a sound rationale to develop new degree program and identify weaknesses and shortcomings in existing ones. This approach minimises subjectivity and potential bias that may adversely influence the process and outcome of the curriculum design and review. The conceptual model also assists in making the review process comprehensive, efficient and cost-effective. Consultation of the stakeholders, including relevant industry, community, and students, should be an integral and critical part of the process. To ensure that meaningful and timely feedback is received from the stakeholders, it is

recommended that this consultation should be undertaken after the internal review committee prepares its interim report. The LOM provides a suitable framework to seek and incorporate much needed contribution from all stakeholders and establish a sound basis to facilitate future reviews and development. The author believes that the LOM can be adapted to conduct sound curriculum design and review of other undergraduate and postgraduate study programs and can enhance their learning outcomes.

## Acknowledgement

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Helen Wozniak and Liz Devonshire

## Working together: Developing eLearning activities to promote interprofessional learning

Liz Devonshire<sup>1</sup> and Helen Wozniak<sup>2</sup>  
Anaesthesia & Pain Management<sup>1</sup> & e-Learning Initiative<sup>2</sup>

In any discipline area, preparing students adequately for the complexities of the workplaces they will enter once they graduate from university is a real challenge. Curriculum needs to incorporate content and contextual issues, while also embedding specific and generic skills development within the framework of the student learning experience. In the health science context, one of the strategies to address this challenge has been the introduction of interprofessional learning. Interprofessional learning (IPL) has been defined in many different ways, but it is perhaps best described as the process by which health professionals learn with, from or about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care (Barr, Koppel, Reeves, Hammick & Freeth, 2005).

Experiencing IPL whilst training can give students the skills they need as health professionals to “work together closely and communicate frequently to optimize care for the patient” (Hall & Weaver, 2001, p868). Optimal care can only occur when health teams function effectively with trust and mutual respect, in an environment where patients are well informed and may take an active role in decisions regarding their management. Research demonstrates improvements in patient care and outcomes when interprofessional teams operate effectively. It is unrealistic to expect that students who have not been educated in an interprofessional way can automatically embrace this role once they enter the workforce.

Not surprisingly IPL has become a key issue in health science education

across the world. The Department of Health in the United Kingdom, for instance, has identified IPL as a leading part of reforming pre-registration education for all health professionals. One initiative to support this reform is the Common Learning Project established at the Universities of Southampton and Plymouth (see <http://www.commonlearning.net/project/index.asp>). In 2003, fourteen professions commenced an integrated program across all years of their undergraduate program. Students work together in multiprofessional learning groups to complete 3 units of study: collaborative learning, interprofessional team working and interprofessional development in practice. Similarly, the Canadian Government (Health Canada, 2005) under the Interprofessional Education for Collaborative Patient-Centred Practice initiative is funding 11 different projects to increase the use of interprofessional teams in health care. The College of Health Disciplines in the University of British Columbia is carrying out one of these projects to provide activities for students studying in a range of health related courses. Given the importance of IPL two speakers were invited to present a keynote address at the last EdHealth Conference (see <http://www.chs.usyd.edu.au/conf05/past/index.shtml#special>).

In our university context the cluster of health science faculties are committed to providing a high level of IPL within the curriculum of their degree programs. Under the goal of excellence in teaching and learning, this cluster has prioritized IPL as a key strategic direction. This is based on the educational goal to produce

health professionals having the attributes needed in the health workforce of the future, namely teamwork skills and a patient centered collaborative approach to practice.

Last year a project “Online facilitation and support of interprofessional learning”, which aimed to advance this goal, was undertaken as part of the USyd eLearning initiative (see <http://www.usyd.edu.au/quality/teaching/elearning.shtml>). This project involved a team of academics from the Faculties of Medicine and Health Sciences and educational designers from the Flexible Online Learning Team, working to develop a range of online resources and learning activities for use by students, facilitators and site educators participating in interprofessional education programs. This article outlines two outcomes of this project (a Roundtable Discussion Activity and a Preclinical Discussion) and describes future directions for IPL during 2006.

### The Roundtable Discussion (RTD) activity

The roundtable discussion activity (RTD) is part of an online unit within the Graduate Studies in Pain Management Program. It is designed as an online role play and built around a ‘real life’ multidisciplinary team meeting to discuss the management of a complex pain condition in an adult patient. The activity represents an authentic task for health professionals involved in assessment, treatment and management of chronic pain conditions. It aims to provide students with the opportunity to experience the process of clinical decision making



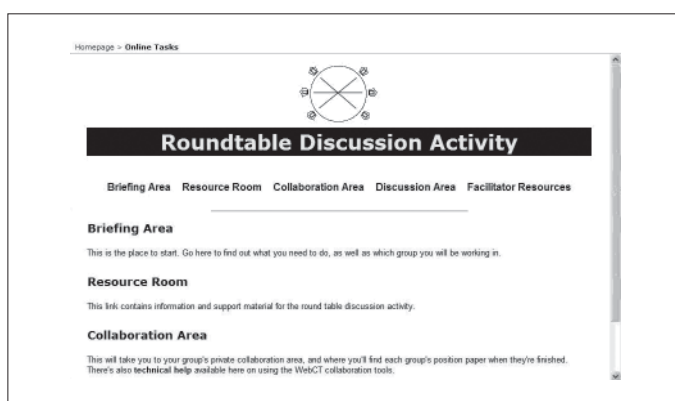


Figure 1: WebCT interface for the RTD

within an interprofessional team context (see figure 1: the WebCT interface).

While the activity is designed for incorporation into a specific unit, a key consideration during development was the reuse and sustainability of the RTD more widely. One reason is that the program has been licensed to two other universities, the University of Edinburgh and University of California San Francisco, which means the RTD has to be delivered and facilitated locally, by staff at each of these institutions. Another reason is the importance of developing elearning resources that have wider application across the health sciences. Thus a key development aim, particularly given the broader IPL agenda outlined above, is to build the activity so it can be adapted for use in other contexts. This is viewed as a realistic outcome as the RTD is modelled on an activity that had already been acknowledged as an exemplar in an AUTC project on ICT-based learning designs (see Brierley et al, 2002a; Brierley et al 2002b). Although designed for delivery in a Physical Geography Unit at Macquarie University, one of the features noted about the original learning design was its potential application to other contexts where different stakeholders need to collaborate in a decision making process.

The RTD activity is structured around two main tasks. The first task is the online role play activity and is conducted over a six week timeframe (see Table 1: Schedule of Activities). The students are divided

into small groups and allocated one of the four stakeholder roles to play. Each small group collaborates online (using the student presentation tool and an asynchronous discussion forum in WebCT) to develop a professional interpretation for their stakeholder role. Having reviewed other professional interpretations, each small group identifies one person to represent their stakeholder role at the multidisciplinary team meeting. Remaining group members act in a consultative and support capacity for the stakeholder. Following the development of the multidisciplinary team recommendations the role play is concluded and students participate in the activity debriefing.

Table 1: Schedule of Activities

| Week | Group Tasks                                                                                |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-2  | Activity Briefing<br>Stakeholder Role Discussion<br>Developing Professional Interpretation |
| 3    | Reviewing Professional Interpretations                                                     |
| 4    | Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting<br>Preparation of MDT Recommendations                 |
| 5-6  | Review and Debrief                                                                         |

The second task is an individual activity. Students are asked to reflect and report on the roundtable discussion activity and re-consider the role-play scenario from a paediatric perspective. They have to evaluate their contribution to the group activity and discuss their insights

about 1) the benefits and challenges of a multidisciplinary team approach in the management of complex pain conditions, and 2) the various stakeholder roles and/or motivations that influence the management of the case.

The evaluation of the RTD following initial implementation in 2005 reinforced the interprofessional nature of the learning activity design. Students reported they appreciated the opportunity to experience the challenges of multidisciplinary teamwork in action, albeit in a simulated format. This point was particularly highlighted by those students who are operating as sole practitioners out in the clinical setting. Most students observed that the role play process deepened their understanding about the benefits that can be gained from a group of health professionals collaborating and integrating their knowledge to improve patient care. Other comments included the insights gained into the perspectives of the other professionals involved. Students had a new appreciation of the different priorities and approaches of each profession in determining an effective management plan for patients with complex pain prob-

lems. While the RTD activity was an enjoyable learning experience, some students remarked that the asynchronous nature of the discussion during the roundtable meeting was a little frustrating. One suggestion was to facilitate this aspect of the activity using a synchronous chat

forum. They recognised, however, the incorporation of a set time for a synchronous discussion could be difficult for some, particularly as most students are busy professionals working full time.

From a teaching perspective the RTD activity provides students with an instructive and rich IPL experience. Acknowledging the somewhat high risk nature of conducting a role play activity online, care is taken to ensure that there are enough learning scaffolds and supports so that students can complete the task. Facilitator resources and a debriefing guide are also prepared to assist the reuse of the activity in other program contexts. For more information about the learning design and to view a working example from the perspective of the student please refer to the College of Health Sciences eLearning Resource Centre, available on the WebCT development server under the institutional bookmarks area (see <http://develop-on-line.auth.usyd.edu.au>).

### Preclinical online discussion activity

The emphasis of the preclinical online discussion activity is to enable students new to study in the health sciences to appreciate fundamental aspects relating to the roles of different health professionals. The activity provides students opportunity to participate in IPL within an online environment before they undertake their profes-

sional practice experiences in health care settings. As Figure 2 shows the activity is contained within a WebCT site. It provides students with profiles of 18 different health professions from faculties across the university.

The activity enables each student to gain experience as a member of an interprofessional health team, and gain insights into the roles and responsibilities of different health professionals. It also helps students to practice communicating with other health professional about relevant patient issues, and develop understanding about how an interprofessional management approach can maximise care, thus improving the overall health outcome for the patient.

### Directions for IPL: 2006-2007

Another two IPL initiatives are now underway. These build on this project and the work of the College of Health Sciences Interprofessional Learning Working Group (2004-2005). Firstly, the IPL clinical placements are being expanded across a range of locations in NSW. Senior year students from various health care professions take part in shared, structured learning activities whilst on clinical placement at the same time in a particular clinical area. The face-to-face aspects are complemented with online learning materials that encourage greater opportunities for interaction between students from

different professional backgrounds. The second project involves the development of a "Teamwork in Health" module. A project team involving representatives from a range of university departments are designing this module which aims to introduce beginning health science students to communication and teamwork issues. Further information about both these projects can be obtained by contacting the project leader Gillian Nisbet (Project leader, Interprofessional Learning, X6 7013 [glnisbet@med.usyd.edu.au](mailto:glnisbet@med.usyd.edu.au))

### Acknowledgement

This work is supported by the University of Sydney's Usyd eLearning, under the auspices of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) and the College of Health Sciences strategic focus on elearning. The project team included the authors and Sue Silveira (Faculty of Health Sciences), Gillian Nisbet (College of Health Sciences), Justin Tauber & Bec Plumbe (educational designers from the Flexible Online Learning Team). We would like to thank Damian Finness and other staff from the Pain Management and Research Centre for their input into the RTD activity.

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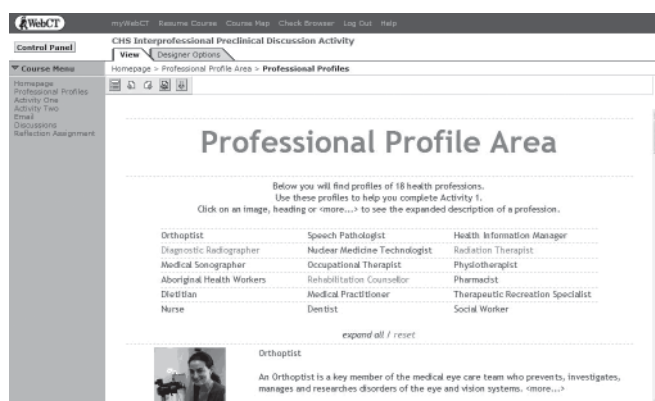


Figure 2: Professional Profile Area of the WebCT site

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**Elizabeth Devonshire** is a Senior Lecturer and is responsible for the educational design of interactive online course materials for the Graduate Studies in Pain Management Program. She was the Academic in Charge of the IPL project that this article reports on, and was directly responsible for leading the development of the Roundtable Discussion Activity. Her university experience has involved educational design, academic staff development, and policy and infrastructure development for flexible learning, in both online and distance contexts. Having completed a Master of Health Science Education in 1996 she is now completing a Doctor of Education.

**Helen Wozniak** has recently moved to a senior lecturer position in the Office of Teaching and Learning in Medicine. This article is based on work she did whilst managing elearning projects within the former College of Health Sciences (see <http://www.usyd.edu.au/webct/projects/CHS/index.shtml>). The article outlines outcomes of one of the projects carried out in 2005. Helen has a keen interest in the development of innovative teaching and learning practices many of which were developed during her 20 years as a clinical supervisor and lecturer in orthoptics. Her teaching and learning innovations were recognized with the awarding of the University of Sydney 2004 Vice-Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Teaching.

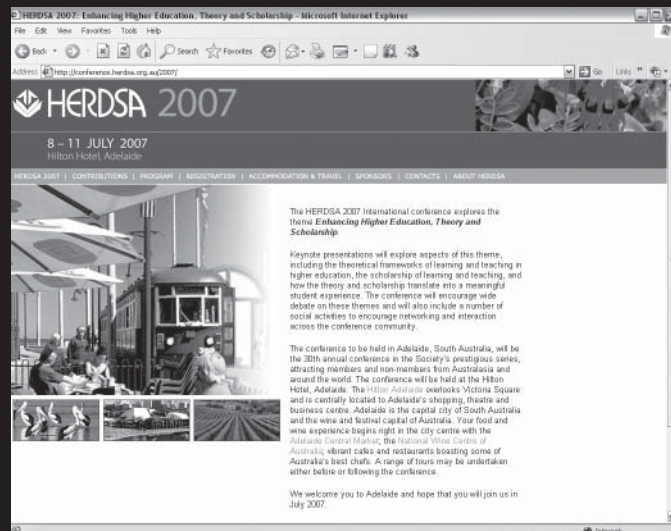
Contact Liz about the article at: [ldevonsh@med.usyd.edu.au](mailto:ldevonsh@med.usyd.edu.au).

## 2007 HERDSA Conference

**Enhancing Higher Education, Theory and Scholarship**

**8-11 July, 2007**

**Adelaide, South Australia**



Keynote presentations will explore aspects of this theme, including the theoretical frameworks of learning and teaching in higher education, the scholarship of learning and teaching, and how the theory and scholarship translate into a meaningful student experience. The conference will encourage wide debate on these themes and will also include a number of social activities to encourage networking and interaction across the conference community.

### Who should attend

The HERDSA conference encourages participation of higher education's many stakeholders including students, academics, researchers, organisational and academic developers, professionals, technical staff, university managers and policy makers. It also provides an ideal forum for members of the wider higher education community to explore higher education issues and future directions

The conference offers a valuable opportunity for the cross fertilization of ideas and sharing of different perspectives. The diversity of participants is also enhanced by the range of nations which will be represented. This creates a unique opportunity for members to explore different approaches to the same issues and the universality of higher education challenges!

**Calls for contributions opens: 4 December 2006**

**Deadline for all submissions: 23 March 2007**

**Visit the conference website at:**  
**<http://conference.hersda.org.au/2007>**

## New Director for the ITL

On Tuesday 3 October Professor Keith Trigwell joins the University as Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning. He has a PhD in Chemistry from the University of Western Australia. Keith was a Fellow of Kellogg College at the University of Oxford and a Reader in Higher Education and Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Advancement of University Learning.

With Mike Prosser, Keith co-wrote one of the seminal texts about university teaching and learning *Understanding Learning and Teaching: The experience in higher education*. We look forward to Keith's arrival.

## News from the Learning and Teaching Alumni Chapter (L&TAC)

The Learning & Teaching Alumni Chapter held its inaugural advanced seminar on transfer of teaching skills from the Graduate Certificate (in Higher Education) to the participant's regular work activities. The seminar was given by Jim Kitay and based on research by Jim Kitay and Paul Ginns. The major findings were that the majority used some of their studies, often despite some negative reactions from colleagues, and felt their teaching had improved directly as a result. Feedback given by all attendees-alumni and graduate certificate participants-the meeting was a complete success. The next advanced seminar to be held Friday 1 September promises to

be just as engaging ... when current recipients of NSW Quality Teaching Awards will share stories of their journeys toward exemplary practice. We look forward to discussing and developing scholarship with past and present colleagues.

If you would like to know more about the L&TAC, visit the website <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/community/alumni.htm>



Jim Kitay

## Excellent teaching in the ITL recognised

Dr Simon Barrie and Dr Tai Peseta were recipients of a 2005 Faculty of Education and Social Work Teaching Excellence Award. Simon and Tai were recognised for their work on the Graduate Certificate in Education Studies (Higher Education). Simon coordinates the unit: University Teaching and Learning; and Tai; Reflection and Practice on University Teaching and Learning. The Grad Cert supports the professional development of university learning and teaching. It brings together academics from various disciplines and professional contexts -- those who consider themselves very experienced university teachers with those who

are might be at the beginning of their academic careers. The award is initially student nominated, and then supported by a peer. Simon and Tai were recognised for:

*Being exemplary role models of the type of reflective practice approach to teaching around which the subjects are designed. They provide a safe, collaborative, respectful yet challenging classroom environment.*

Simon and Tai wish to thank the participants in the 2005 cohort.

## New site launched!!! Development Program for Research Higher Degree Supervision

The ITL is pleased to launch the new website for the professional and academic development of research higher degree supervisors. The site was redesigned to better account for the current institutional context of supervision accreditation, training and registration, to reflect some of the more recent scholarly literature about supervision development, and to clarify the process of completion.

Visit the new site at:  
[www.itl.usyd.edu.au/supervision](http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/supervision)







### **Recent ITL publications and presentation**

Applebee, A. A., Sheely, S., McShane, K., and Ellis, R.A. (2005) Balancing Act; How can universities recognize the scholarly nature of eLearning development for university teachers. *In Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Maintaining the Momentum*. (pp. 17-25). Refereed Proceedings of the 22nd Annual ASCILITE Conference, Queensland University of Technology, Queensland.

[http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/brisbane05/blogs/proceedings/03\\_Applebee.pdf](http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/brisbane05/blogs/proceedings/03_Applebee.pdf)

Asmar, C. (2005) Politicising student difference: The Muslim experience. *International Perspectives on Higher Education Research, Volume 3: International Relations*. Edited by Malcolm Tight. Oxford, UK: Elsevier Ltd, 129-157.

Asmar, C. (2005) Internationalising Students: Reassessing diasporic and local student difference. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30, 3, 291-309.

Barrie, S. (2006). Becoming Academic: Generic Attributes of University Teachers (not their students!). Paper presented at the International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) Conference, University of Sheffield, 11-13 June.

Brew, A. (2006). *Research and Teaching: Beyond the Divide*. NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Ellis, R.A., and Calvo, R. A. (2006). Discontinuities in university student

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Ellis, R. A., Taylor, C. and Drury, H. (2006). University student conceptions of learning through writing. *Australian Journal of Education*. 50, 1, 6-28.

Jackson, M. (2005) 'Great Class Room Teaching: Awards for Teaching', *International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, Vancouver, 14-16 Oct 2005.

McShane, K. (2005). "Sending Messages to a Machine": Articulating Ethe-real Selves in Blended Teaching (and Learning). Paper presented at the Ideas in Cyberspace Education (ICE) Symposium, Higham Hall, Lake District, UK, 23-25 February.

Peseta, T.L. & Brew, A. (2006). From autobiography to case study: supervision learning and development through writing. Paper presented at the Quality in Postgraduate Research (QPR) Conference, Adelaide, 21-22 April.

Peseta, T.L., Barrie, S., Brew, A., McShane, K., Applebee, A. (2006). When teachers become learners again: a Graduate Certificate program for supercomplexity. Paper presented at the International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) Conference, University of Sheffield, 11-13 June.

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Approaches to Teaching Inventory. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 24, 349-360



### **Research seminars in the ITL**

The ITL coordinates a comprehensive seminar program each semester. They are held on Wednesdays, 4-5.30pm in Carslaw Room 354. If you would like to be included on a list for notification, or would like to present some of your own research or scholarship about learning and teaching, please contact Kim McShane [k.mcshane@itl.usyd.edu.au](mailto:k.mcshane@itl.usyd.edu.au).

#### **September 13**

Practice-based research into ideas, symbols, and the resultant techniques for painting in oils about the theme of divinity  
Inje Jarosiewicz, Institute for Teaching and Learning

#### **October 4**

Teaching and Assessing Reflective Practice and Systems Thinking in Engineering  
Dr Anna Carew, Centre for Educational Development and Interactive Resources, UWollongong

#### **October 18**

Learning and Teaching in the Faculty of Education & Social Work  
Dr Donna O'Connor with Panel (Education & Social Work)

#### **November 8**

Technologies transforming academics: academic identity and online teaching  
Kim McShane, Institute for Teaching and Learning



## ***In their own words: finding out what students think about their university learning experience***

**Rachel Symons, Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching)**

**T**he Quality Assurance processes at the University of Sydney are linked with Quality Improvement through analysis, reporting and action on student feedback. The Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ) for both undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students and the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) are tools used to gather information about the student experience at the University. The University considers the views of its students, as collected through the SCEQ and SREQ open response comments, to be a valuable and necessary input into its quality enhancement processes. To this end, a method for collating, analysing, evaluating and reporting on these opinions, and ensuring that students are made aware of the value of their comments and their contribution to the improvement of their experiences, has been instigated.

In this article, I demonstrate how a database of over 76,000 open ended comments collected from SCEQ and SREQ questionnaires since 2000 is analysed; and how this contributes to institutional and individual review strategies across the University. I will show how the process used, and the reports provided to faculties and administrative units, add value to quality enhancement processes, and ensure that the evaluation and feedback cycle is completed by providing students with evidence that their comments are reaching the intended audience. I will also outline new developments in the process which will lead to the provision of more specific and comprehensive reports to faculties and administrative units across the university.

### **Database of comments**

The basis of these reports is a database of 76,470 comments received in response to the open questions in the SCEQ and SREQ since 2000. The number of comments received each year is growing – from 4,500 in 2000 to 19,629 in 2005, providing a complex and unique database of information about students' perceptions of their university experience. A measure of the importance that is placed on these comments, and the possible realisation by students that their opinions are valued by the University, is found in the high percentage of undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and postgraduate research students who are taking the time to provide constructive and worthwhile observations on their experiences – an average of 75-80% of all respondents.

### **Why analyse the comments**

During the Academic Board Faculty Review process conducted between 2001 and 2004, it became apparent that student interviewees provided the most revealing and perceptive

observations about teaching and learning, and research training within their faculties. In the same way, comments made in response to the open ended questions in the SCEQ and SREQ can be said to provide a clear indication of the importance of certain issues to the student community. Students are forthright with their opinions. The repeated pattern of themes occurring within comments reflects shared experiences for each group of students.

Students' perceptions of their experiences, in relation to both their degree course and student administration and student support services, provided in the open responses present a valuable insight into both faculty and university processes. They also provide input into quality assurance and improvement processes across the university.

### **Analysing the comments**

The manual analysis and evaluation method used by the University is based on an in-house taxonomy which allows for standardisation of reporting across the university and ease of comparison with the SCEQ/ SREQ quantitative analysis reports. Within the taxonomy, the main categories are based on the SCEQ/ SREQ items, and sub-categories based on their characteristics. Additional categories, based on 'intelligence' gained through Academic Board Review discussions and frequency of occurrence in students' comments are also included.

- |                           |                                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Evaluation and feedback | • Clear goals and standards         |
| • Academic Board policies | • Appropriate assessment            |
| • Curriculum              | • Appropriate workload              |
| • Skills development      | • Elearning                         |
| • Learning community      | • Research-led teaching             |
| • Learning resources      | • Student progression and retention |
| • Overall satisfaction    | • Cultural diversity                |
| • Good teaching           | • Equity                            |

*Categories used in the analysis of SCEQ Open Response comments*

Categories used for the SREQ are identical to the SREQ factor scales, with the addition of Administration and organisation, Ethics Administration, Academic Board policies, and International Office.

This taxonomy is under constant revision as the need to sub-divide categories becomes apparent. For example, until 2005 the category Online learning and resources was used to record all comments mentioning students' experiences of elearning. In 2005, the increase of elearning across the university, and the review of its use, has necessitated the sub-division of this category into the following elements: Online resources; Elearning: uptake by students/ staff; Learning management systems; Support provided; and Face to face vs. online learning. NB: The SCEQ included specific questions on elearning for the first time in the 2005 survey. These additional qualitative analysis topics reflect these changes.

Since most of the reports that are generated from the comments database are cumulated by faculty, a three step method of analysis has been devised that allows each faculty to receive its own individual report, together with a comparison from previous years. This methodology is based on the receipt of a single document for each set of responses to each open ended question from each faculty – a total of ten questions for each faculty. The number of comments in each document ranges from below 20 (postgraduate coursework comments in small faculties) to over 300 (undergraduate comments in large faculties). The three steps are:

1. Counting of constructive comments received for each question.
2. Counting the number of times each aspect is mentioned in the comments received. This is done on the basis of a comment being what is written by an individual respondent; and a tally in the recording sheet being a specific phrase or sentence referring to one aspect of the stu-

dent experience. Since students may include more than one aspect in a comment, careful reading of every comment is required to ensure that crucial observations are not omitted from the final count.

3. Entering the data into a spreadsheet which calculates the total number of times an aspect is mentioned in any one set of comments as a percentage of comments received for the year being analysed. Since the number of comments received varies from year to year, this allows for standardisation across the years.

This is a fairly labour intensive process, especially when one is looking at reading and analysing nearly 20, 000 comments, and when text analysis software is available which might perform the task quicker. However, we consider that human intervention better serves the needs of quality enhancement processes, and provides a more thorough scrutiny and evaluation and reporting process. Limitations to computer analysis include: the insufficiency of retrieval capabilities in certain software categories; the lack of validity when dealing with metaphors, homonyms and colloquialisms and other aspects of natural language; and the inability of the computer to replace

## **Reporting on the student experience**

Since reporting the results of the analysis is an integral part of quality enhancement at the University, a number of different types of reports, using the data from the student comments, have been designed to meet the needs of faculties, administrators, senior management and other stakeholders.

### **Annual analysis reports**

Since 2002, each faculty has been provided with a report on the most common aspects of the student experience – undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and postgraduate research. A comparison is provided with previous years, and sample comments from the reporting year are included. Student confidentiality is maintained by excluding comments that may identify students, particularly in faculties with small student numbers. Faculties may use these reports to supplement their own internal analysis and include them in documentation prepared for external accreditation visits. These reports available through the Learning and Teaching website (<http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning>).

An annual report on strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement

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***The University considers the views of its students... to be a valuable and necessary input into its quality enhancement processes.***

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human judgement. On the other hand, manual analysis allows for local knowledge and organisational intelligence, gained through participation in Academic Board reviews; familiarity with degree programs, policies and procedures; and an awareness of previous years' SCEQ and SREQ evaluations, to inform each analysis and report. Spelling and transcription errors, ambiguities in comments, and the correct contextual analysis of similar phrases, are also only possible through manual analysis.

in learning and teaching at the University, based on the faculty reports, is provided to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). This report informs future strategies and priorities for the Learning and Teaching portfolio, especially in the area of enhancing the student experience. Together with the faculty reports, it feeds into the Academic Board review process and the University Learning and Teaching Plan.

### **Trends analysis reports**

The Trends Analysis Report links together the quantitative data from the SCEQ/ SREQ percentage agreement analysis, the qualitative data from the analysis of the open response comments, and commendations and recommendation from Academic Board Faculty Reviews. The report includes a commentary on the results of the analysis of the open ended comments, linking them to commendations and recommendations from the Academic Board Faculty review and to the relevant SCEQ/ SREQ (percentage agreement) time series. It provides a picture of the student experience in the faculty from 2000 to the date of the report. Sample comments are included. These reports have been provided in the past to faculties who underwent Academic Board reviews during 2004. In the future they will be included with Academic Board review data collection forms, and be available through the Institute for Teaching and Learning website.

Staff concerns about the validity of individual comments, and whether they express the view of the vocal minority are allayed when supporting evidence through linkage with other data is supplied in one document e.g. Academic Board review comments, and SCEQ quantitative data. As one staff member expressed it:

The analysis is most useful when it provides an additional, semi-quantitative perspective on areas of concern that can be identified from the numerical results... particularly when it is linked to Academic Board commendations and recommendations. Another very useful aspect is the discussion of trends over time.

Since individual faculties do not have the time to create the trends analysis themselves, the reports are proving valuable in identifying the areas that are consistently under-performing and those in which they are performing well.

### **Subject specific reports**

Finally, there are the subject specific reports which provide input into quality improvement processes for non-faculty or cross-university aspects of the student experience. There are three types of reports which fall into this category:

**Regular reports** – provide annual/ biennial information on the student experience in cross-university aspects of the student experience and currently include: International students' experiences; Library services; Elearning; Research led teaching; and Students services.

These reports have been used to inform strategic planning processes in the library, and provide input into internationalisation reviews.

**Email reports** – these are provided to individual centres and services that do not receive enough comments to provide a subject specific report e.g. Koori Centre, Registrar's Office, Ethics administration, Learning Centre. Similarly, comments are provided as evidence to support applications for the Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Support of the Student Experience.

**On demand reports** - provided as and when needed by senior management; usually on the university wide student experience relating to aspects of teaching and learning. Recent reports include: assessment and feedback; relevance of course to work; standard of teaching; quality of teaching; and mentoring.

### **What the students are saying**

What do students think about their experiences at the University? What are the main areas of best practice and areas of concern in learning and teaching? An analysis of the comments received from the 2003 SCEQ indicated a consistency of experience across faculties, with a number of topics appearing in the top five aspects for most faculties.

The following issues regularly appear in the top three areas of best practice in most faculties:

- a. Curriculum: content and structure
- b. Curriculum: practical aspects
- c. Standard of teaching received
- d. Assessment

The following issues regularly appear in the top three areas of concern in most faculties:

- a. Curriculum: content and structure
- b. Standard of teaching received
- c. Assessment
- d. Useful and timely feedback
- e. Workload

It should be noted, however, that the absence of favourable comments on a particular aspect of learning and teaching does not reflect that this is not an area of best practice. Rather that the students are happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting on areas in need of improvement. Since 2000, more comments have been received from undergraduate students in reply to questions asking students to list areas in need of improvement than those asking for areas of best practice. The reverse is true for postgraduate coursework students.

### **Use of the SCEQ reports by faculties**

The Faculty of Economics and Business used results for the 2003 SCEQ in the development of at least one Teaching Improvement Fund (TIF, now Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme) application (group work and elearning) and reports that they have been useful in designing further evaluations.

In the Faculty of Veterinary Science reports are placed on the intranet on the Teaching and Learning Committee site; they are discussed at Teaching and Learning Committee



meetings; course or year coordinators are asked to reflect on results and come up with strategies to address areas that need remediation; and they are summarised and discussed at faculty meetings twice a year. Together with USE data and SCEQ quantitative results, they are used to plan curriculum reform and review. At the beginning of each year, students are informed about the changes in programs made as a result of the SCEQ and USE results from the previous year.

The message from Assoc Professor Rosanne Taylor, Faculty of Veterinary Science on the use of SCEQ and other forms of data and feedback is:

Use them as another source of gathering feedback and gaining insight into student perspectives on their learning experience. Take a look overall, including this, and then take a system wide approach to planning curriculum improvement, staff development and better quality assurance if you want to make real differences.

### New developments

The comments from the 2000 to 2003 SCEQ, and the 2002 – 2004 SREQ, were received in text format – one document for each question from each student group. Therefore, whilst it was possible to identify comments from undergraduate, postgraduate coursework, and postgraduate research students, it was not possible to break down comments by year of study, or by local or international students. This year, for the first time, comments have been received as an Access database, which will allow for interrogation under categories of students – e.g. by degree, first year, final year, international students.

The impact of this new development will be to provide more specific and comprehensive reports. I use the case of the report on the experiences of international students as a case in point. In the past,

these comments were identified by three methods – the mention of the words ‘international’ or ‘overseas’ or ‘home country’ or similar phrases; or the mention of International Office or ISSU; or the phraseology of the comment indicating it was from a non-English language student (which of course may have included local NESB students). In 2004, 349 comments were retrieved by this method from the answers to the 2003 SCEQ and SREQ. This year, the Access database was queried to retrieve all comments submitted by international students – the result was a total number 2537 from the response to all open questions – a substantial increase which will result in a more representative report of the experiences of international students at the University. In addition, in providing data to the DVC (International) and the Director, International Office, reports can now also be provided at faculty level – a facility not previously possible.

Lists of comments from specific student groups are also possible. So far this year the faculties of Arts and Health Sciences have received documents listing comments from first year students, and the faculty of Veterinary Science, those from final year students. These reports are divided into those in response to questions on the Best aspects of the experience and those in response to questions on Areas in need of improvement. Comments on degree and student administration/ support services are included as some aspects are mentioned in responses to both questions e.g. library, computer access centres, elearning. Other reports which are now possible include: comments by students undertaking double degrees; comments by students undertaking cross faculty degrees. These reports can be requested from Rachel Symons, Special Projects Officer, Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) (email: [rachels@vcc.usyd.edu.au](mailto:rachels@vcc.usyd.edu.au); phone: 9351 3517)

### A unique service

Whilst other universities may distribute comments received from similar surveys to their faculties, indicating the main areas of best practice or concern, it is possible that no other university undertakes such a stringent analysis, providing individualised reports to academic staff, faculties, administrative units, and senior management. So it can be said, that at The University of Sydney, we are providing a unique service – one that will continue to grow and develop as it is continually reviewed, evaluated and improved. Students’ perceptions of their experiences are a valuable and important part of the continuous quality improvement cycle at the University. It also validates the time and effort students dedicate to completing the SCEQ and SREQ surveys.

### References

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**Rachel Symons** is Special Projects Officer in the Learning and Teaching Portfolio and has been involved in quality enhancement in learning and teaching since her appointment as Quality Assurance Officer (Learning and Teaching) in 2001. She was involved in setting up the Academic Board reviews, and developing the processes around the qualitative analysis of student feedback. Her experience in quality assurance commenced with the development of national interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral projects to enable all Australians to access their documentary heritage. She encourages the dissemination of management information about the student experience, through the creation of generic and specific reports, and the development of an in-house taxonomy to standardise reporting across the University. To contact Rachel about the data available from the SCEQ, email her at: [rachels@vcc.usyd.edu.au](mailto:rachels@vcc.usyd.edu.au)

# conferences



## **Higher Education Teaching and Learning**

**AUSTRALIA, NZ AND ASIAN REGION**

### **Effective Teaching and Learning Conference**

*Theme: 21st Century University Teaching and Learning: Continuing the Conversation*  
2-3 November, 2006  
The University of Queensland, AUSTRALIA  
<http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/ETLConference06/>

### **Australian Association for Research in Education**

*Theme: Engaging Pedagogies*  
27-30 November, 2006  
Universities of Adelaide and South Australia, AUSTRALIA  
<http://www.aare.edu.au/conf2006/details.htm>

### **Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE)**

*Theme: Who's Learning? Who's Technology?*  
3-6 December, 2006  
The University of Sydney, AUSTRALIA  
<http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/sydney06/>

## **UK, EUROPE & THE MEDITERRANEAN**

### **Improving Student Learning Through Teaching**

4-6 September, 2006  
University of Bath, ENGLAND  
[http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/oscd/1\\_ocslid/isl2006/](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/oscd/1_ocslid/isl2006/)

### **Challenge and Change in the Higher Education Learning Environment: Process and Practice**

4-6 September, 2006  
University of Ulster, Londonderry, NORTHERN IRELAND  
<http://www.ulster.ac.uk/staffdev/International%20T&L/index.phtml>

### **Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)**

*Theme: Mapping Educational Development: locations, boundaries and bridges*  
21-22 November, 2006  
Birmingham, ENGLAND  
<http://www.seda.ac.uk/confs/birm06/birm06.htm>

### **Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE)**

*Theme: Beyond Boundaries - New Horizons for Research into Higher Education*  
12-14 December, 2006  
Brighton, ENGLAND  
<http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2006/>

## **CANADA & THE AMERICAS**

### **EDUVentures**

*The Future of Higher Education: In a Borderless World*  
17-19 October, 2006  
Boston, MA, US  
<http://www.eduventures.com/events>

### **Professional and Organizational Network in Higher Education**

*Theme: Theory and Research for a Scholarship of Practice*  
25-29 October, 2006  
Portland, Oregon, US  
<http://podnetwork.org/conferences/2006/proposals.htm>

### **American Society for Higher Education (ASHE)**

*Theme: Borderlands | Borderlines in Higher Education*  
1-4 November, 2006  
Orange County, California, US  
<http://www.ashe.ws/conf06/>

### **International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL)**

*Theme: Making a Greater Difference: Connecting to Transformational Agendas*  
9-12 November, 2006  
Washington DC, Capitol Hill, US  
<http://www.issotl.indiana.edu/ISSOTL/>



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